

CORPSE. ALL INCLUSIVE

a comedy

by Anatoliy Krym

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Anatoliy Krym

«CORPSE. ALL INCLUSIVE»
Inhuman comedy

CHARACTERS

ARKADIY

LIZA

NURSING ASSISTANT

CONSOLER

UNCLE PASHA

FIRST ACT

There are several doors leading to the big hall of the funeral house “Paradise”. On the walls there are mournful attributes of the funeral business – wreathes, flowers, photographs. There is a massive table at the far side of the room, where sits solemnly the Nursing Assistant – a thick man of fifty. He is reading a newspaper and chewing a sandwich lazily. The telephone is ringing. The Nursing Assistant answers the phone impatiently.

NURSING ASSISTANT. There is nobody here! It is Sunday!.. Oh, chief, it is you! I am not a slob, this is just my the voice... Persistent!.. How could I know it was you? What are we doing? I am going to bury yesterday`s boozier. He is scheduled for Tuesday, but his wife went nuts: “bury him today, I can`t stand it, my heart is breaking!” I guess, he really pissed her off!... You know, boss, philosophy is a weakness of mine! And what else is there for an intelligent person to do? To watch the downhill of life and shuffle a deck of destinies!.. What?!.. No big deal. We`ll wash him, dress him up and send “to a long journey for many years”! (*looks at the watch*). In about an hour! Are you fishing?.. Asked for a case, what if your wife calls... No, your personal life is not my business! Good bye!.. (*He hangs up and is looking at the telephone for a while*). Nutsack!..

The door is decisively opened, letting LIZA in, she is accompanied by a middle-aged man, who is working in the funeral house as a CONSOLER.

Liza is wearing a dark dress and a black hat with a mourning crape. The Consoler is dressed up as a pre-revolutionary earl, going to a ball – dress coat, false shirt-front, top hat. He is holding a black suit on the hanger and shoes.

CONSOLER. Here we are!

The Nursing Assistant puts aside his sandwich, takes a thick notebook, cleans his hands with his whites.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Second name?

LIZA (*stumblingly*). Mine?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*irritatedly*). Of the departed!

LIZA. Ovsyannikov. Arkadiy Romanovich.

NURSING ASSISTANT. A minute! (*Looking through the papers*). Well, you are scheduled for tomorrow! Why to rush the matter? We have a new fridge, we have got your husband safe, he will not run away!..

LIZA (*through tears*). His uncle from Sudak has a return ticket for a night train. The high season is about to start and the uncle owns a tourist hotel. He insists Arkadiy to be buried today!...

CONSOLER. I wish I had an uncle like that!

NURSING ASSISTANT. One should be paid for urgency!

LIZA (*getting the papers out of her bag*). I wanted to discuss this question. Here...

NURSING ASSISTANT. What is this?

LIZA. Your agreement.

NURSING ASSISTANT. I can see that. So what?

LIZA. There are too many excessive services in it.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Here we go! You have a package of a standard departed! Burial service, orchestra, speech of a public member, a wreath. Do you want a social package? No problem! Bring the document from the city administration that you are on record as economically disadvantaged, and we will bury your husband with discount.

LIZA (*helplessly*). But today is Sunday, the city administration is closed!

NURSING ASSISTANT. And what am I supposed to do? Do you want me to make up the difference out of my own pocket?

LIZA. Maybe we can cut here ... and here...

NURSING ASSISTANT (*irritatedly*). Cut? What?!

LIZA (*indecisively*). Assorted fish platter... liver cake...

NURSING ASSISTANT. Lady?! Are you out of your mind?! You have “all inclusive”! All inclusive! Buffet service! Like in Turkey! Look: coffin, laced with atlas, funeral team of six persons, orchestra! Grisha, at last!

LIZA. Can we do that without orchestra? Our neighbor, uncle Mitya, promised to come with the accordion. He plays the funeral march very well. I heard it at the funeral of the old lady from the fifth entrance hall.

NURSING ASSISTANT. That’s an outrage! Lady! Just like at the restaurant: you cannot come to our place with your own bottle! E.g. – accordion!..

LIZA (*carefully*). And this one... Is he Grisha?

CONSOLER (*arrogantly*). Do you not like me? Everybody likes me and you don`t!

LIZA. Why do you get offended? You behave in a strange manner!.. You follow me everywhere as if you were my date, giving me strange clues!.. You came to my house without invitation and scared all the neighbors with your top hat, everybody thought: a foreigner came! And first thing you did at my place was to get into my closet!

NURSING ASSISTANT. This is his job! He is a consoler! Con-so-ler!

LIZA. What does a consoler mean?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. This is our branded one! We don`t leave our clients alone with their grief! Who will take care of you, console you? The family is not to rely on! In the time of mourning all their social masks and facepaint are off and their nature is shown!..

CONSOLER. And this nature is often very sneaky! The only thing they want is to steal crystal glass from your apartment, or retail gossips about the deceased all around the city!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Death has an ugly face! But it does not have mercy on the alive either!

LIZA. And... how long is he going to take care of me?

CONSOLER. 24 hours.

NURSING ASSISTANT. For additional cost he can stay overnight!

LIZA. No! I'm good.

CONSOLER. It can be scary in the dead's house at night! There are demons, ghosts! And here I am. We can talk by candle-light! You will splash out everything you have inside! I am ready to listen to any revelation!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha is a professional in the best meaning of this word!

LIZA. Thank you! My sister will stay with me for the night!

CONSOLER (*interestedly*). A younger sister?

LIZA. Is there any difference?

CONSOLER. Actually none.

LIZA. Also I wanted to discuss a funeral repast. You charge a lot of extra! Aunt Klava says, that she will set the table while we will be at the cemetery.

NURSING ASSISTANT. No-no-no! Please, understand, you have "all inclusive"! "All inclusive" means that the client is relaxed and is enjoying! That is why accept my advice – take it easy! Our firm guarantees satisfaction. The funeral repast will take place here, over the wall. The second door by the corridor. We have already brought the products and the cook is already here. Al, our services are at the highest level. If you want to get it all anyhow – go to "Anubis"! They have coffins made of plywood and you will have yuck for the funeral repast! And orchestra? Have you heard our orchestra? London Symphony Orchestra is no match for it!

LIZA. And may I talk to the director?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Today is a day off. The director will be here tomorrow.

CONSOLER. He is consoling the secretary.

LIZA (*frightenedly*). Did one of his relatives die also?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Wait, Grisha! (*to Liza*). Did you spend much money for the wedding?

LIZA. Which wedding?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Your wedding. With the decedent!

LIZA. I don't remember... What does it have to do with it?..

NURSING ASSISTANT. I mean that a man may have many weddings in his life! One, two! Even three sometimes! And nobody counts money at the wedding – everybody is enjoying! And death happens once in a lifetime! Only once – do you understand this?! Did you love him? You did! And can a real love be measured with dollars? Love has different measures! Spiritual! Cosmic! Money is nothing! Trash! Did you hear what smart people say? “There are no pockets in the coffin!” No tears now! We will need your tears a bit later!..

CONSOLE. Can we give her a discount?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Can you see what a sympathetic personnel we have?

CONSOLE. My heart is breaking! Such a nice woman and a widow now!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Well! Hit-or-miss! I will draw the fire on myself! 10 percent discount! My chief will gripe my ass, but let'em all come!

LIZA. Thank you!..

CONSOLE (*to Liza*). My dear! We are behind the schedule! Let`s drees your guy up and go to the “garden”!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Where are you hurrying to? There is still one time left before the final whistle! (*to Liza*) Do you want to be present at the dressing?!

LIZA (*scared*). No!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Are you afraid of the departed? You shouldn`t! You should be afraid of the alive! (*To the Consoler*). Give me the suit! (*Takes the suit from the hands of the Consonant*). Did you check the pockets?

LIZA. What pockets?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Ordinary pockets! What if there is a stash?

LIZA (*frightendly*). I have never picked his pockets!..

The Nursing Assistant turns the jacket and the trousers pockets out.

NURSING ASSISTANT (*to Liza*). Not so long ago we were burying one jeweler, and the next day his wife came running and screamed: dig him out! The thing is

that she remembered that before the third search he sewed the diamonds into the sleeve cuff!

LIZA (*in a trembling voice*). Did you dig him out?

NURSING ASSISTANT. What the hell! Who has sewed the pockets?!

CONSOLER (*quietly*). Valya, it is our suit.

LIZA. They say he should be buried in black.

CONSOLER. She had only a grey one at home. And one coffee-colored, but with spots. I demonstrated understanding and offered an exchange! (*to Liza*) And you were asking why I got into your closet!

LIZA. You could have said you needed a black suit...

CONSOLER (*offended*). It is not for me! It's for the defunct!

NURSING ASSISTANT. We'll get it all sorted out! (*to Liza*) While we will be getting him dressed, you may go for a turn by the "garden" and choose a memorial stone.

LIZA (*carefully*). And why is the memorial stone in the garden?

CONSOLER. "Garden" in gammon and patter means cemetery! Can I call you by your first name, Liza? We will mess around here till late at night!..

LIZA. I've been a widow only for 24 hours now, and you already offer to call me by my first name! What will people say?

CONSOLER. I am on duty! I don't pay attention to the gossips! Hang upon my arm and let's go to meet the guests.

He is leading Liza to the door. She stopped at the doorway.

LIZA. I am sorry, what did the doctor say?

NURSING ASSISTANT. What doctor?

LIZA. It is written in your agreement: "autopsist services, one hundred USD".

NURSING ASSISTANT. Are you talking about the autopsy? We will take it out of the list! Yesterday there was a football match, European cup! And Evgueniy Semenovich is a die-hard fan! We had to cancel the autopsy! We will return money. But everything is clear with your husband even without any autopsy.

CONSOLER. He shouldn't have boozed that much!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*strictly*). Grisha! (*to Liza*). The death was caused by alcohol intoxication. Was he “amateur” or “professional”?

LIZA. He didn't drink alcohol! Only when our little shop was burned, he did, out of despair...

CONSOLER. Sorry, what products were you selling?

LIZA. Sneakers. Didn't the doctor say anything else?

NURSING ASSISTANT. If it's any comfort, Evgeniy Semenovitch said that your husband is of no interest for “organs hunters”.

LIZA. He will have a birthday in a month... Fifty... Milestone birthday.

CONSOLER. Liza, don't get involved in the philosophical maze! Died or not – above, in the heaven, there is a better position to judge!

The Consoler, holding her by the elbow, wants to lead her away.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Oh, I nearly forgot to mention that! What church were you going to?

LIZA. Arkadiy was atheist!

NURSING ASSISTANT. What a character!

CONSOLER (*kindly*). You will get in hot water without church burial, people will talk...

LIZA. Do whatever you want! I don't care!...

CONSOLER. There you go! (*Takes a handkerchief, wipes Liza's eyes*).

Everything will be fine... He is neither the first one to die nor the last! It is still a question where it is better – here or there!... I guess it is better there!

LIZA (*frightened*). Why?

CONSOLER. Up to now no one has returned from there! (*is laughing*). It's a joke!

The Consoler leads Liza out the room. The Nursing Assistant picks up the phone.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Uncle Pasha, what about the dinner?.. You see, Vasiliy is absent and I need to prepare a corpse for departure. Will you help me?.. I understand you have steakes! By the time they take the “box” away, bury him, you will have prepared three funeral repasts!.. What? What cured fillet? You are kidding me! Ok, I’m coming! Quickie!

Having become more cheerful, he takes a bottle and a glass out of the small cabinet, drinks with delight, then runs away.

Suddenly the silence is broken by the sound of a wind band.

The trumpeter is trying to play “Czardas” by Monti, but hits the wrong note and embarrassedly falls silent.

The door to the mortuary is indecisively opened, Arkadiy, wrapped in the sheet, comes out from there. He has a toe tag on his left foot and looks like a person woken up after a drinking bout. Wincing at headache, Arkadiy is massaging his temples.

ARKADIY. Oh my God! Pissed as a newt!.. Br-r-r!.. *(Looking for some water, takes the bottle from the table, smells it and, shuddering, puts it aside).* Ugh, yuck!.. Who did I drink with?.. The jerk was pouring with the left hand! But who?!. Bonifatsiy or Silvestr Petrovich?.. Why is it so cold!.. *(Looks at the sheet he is wrapped in).* Sobering-up station? I thought they had been all closed! Hey! Is anybody there?! *(Looks in the door he has just gone out).* Here are two more beastly drunk guys!.. What kind of office is this? Maybe, this is the hospital? Hey, people! Guu-uys!

Staggering to the exit, he falls down, gets up, opens the door, goes out.

The Nursing Assistant comes in from another door, chewing something... Liza is hurrying after him.

NURSING ASSISTANT *(with displeasure)*. If ten persons less come, you will take the leftovers. If more persons come, than we expect, they will also get share of the cake! Don`t fuss about!

LIZA. Ten portions are unnecessary, why shall I pay for them?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Tell me, what are you thinking about? Your husband has died! You are in grief! The ground crumbled under your feet! The nature is in mourning! The birds are silent! And you are talking about salads and steaks!.. Your business is to die and the rest will be done by the professionals!

Appears Arkadiy stiff with cold.

ARKADIY. Look, will you tell me, please... Where is the exit? I seem to have got lost!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*blankly*). What exit?..

ARKADIY. Look, man, can you explain what the office is this? Some drunk guys are lying there, in the corridor there are coffins, wreathes. What did I get myself into?

Suddenly the NURSING ASSISTANT falls down. Then, giving a gasp, Liza sits down on the floor.

What the hell is going on here? (*shaking the Nursing Assistant*). Man, where are my clothes?!

(*Noticing Liza*). Liza?! What are you doing here?!

He is trying to bring the woman round.

The CONSOLER comes in.

The CONSOLER. Lizzy, I have chosen the wreath for you! And a ribbon: "From an inconsolable widow"! (*In surprise*). What is wrong? Who are you?

ARKADIY. You explain me! My shop has burned and I drowned my sorrow! Then I was out like a light! I came to myself. Frozen to death! I wanted to go home, but somebody stashed my clothes! And then my wife with this one entered and flopped on the floor! What organization is this, guys?

The Consoler falls on his knees in front of Liza.

CONSOLER. Liza! My dear Liza! (*Giving mouth to mouth*). Liza...

ARKADIY (*taken aback*). Hey, what is wrong with you? Hey, dude!

He is trying to push the Consoler away from Liza.

CONSOLER. Back off! Let me give her mouth-to-mouth resuscitation!

He continues kissing Liza.

ARKADIY. Stop with your kisses! She is a married woman!

CONSOLER. Bollocks to that! She is a widow!

ARKADIY. What?! I will show you the widow now!

Rushes to the Consoler. The Nursing Assistant, after waking up, is crawling to the table. Grabbing the bottle with vodka, is gobbling from the bottle neck.

NURSING ASSISTANT. What a football fan!.. Just you dare to come!..

CONSOLER. Valya, what is going on?

NURSING ASSISTANT. I will kill him!..

CONSOLER (*pointing at Arkadiy*). This one?

NURSING ASSISTANT. I will kill Semionych! I will saw him up into a hundred pieces!..

CONSOLER. What does Semionych have to do with it?.. Where is liquid ammonia? (*He is rummaging in the desk of the Nursing Assistant, finds liquid ammonia*). Found!

Runs to Liza, brings the bottle to her face. Liza, shivering, is trying to get up.

ARKADIY (*screaming*). Explain me, where I am and what my wife is doing here?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. I will explain you! You, jerk, I will explain you everything now!

ARKADIY. Who gave you the right to insult me?!

CONSOLER. Liza, Liza, it is not good!.. Come to think of it! He is unworthy of you!

ARKADIY. Live her alone!

CONSOLER. Valya, I don't understand, what ghost is this?

NURSING ASSISTANT. He is her husband.

CONSOLER. "Corpse"?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Exactly!

CONSOLER. And why is it walking about here as if he were alive?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*with hostility*). Ask Semionych! This jackass was hurrying to football yesterday! I told him: "Semionych, dissect the corpse first,

football won't run away"! And he says: I can see hepatic cirrhosis even through the skin!

ARKADIY. Wait! What football? What cirrhosis? What Semionych? This is the tenth time I ask you: where am I and what is my wife doing here?!!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha, take the client away!

CONSOLE (to Liza). Let's go, my dear, let's leave them to it!

ARKADIY. Liza, stay here! It's my order!

LIZA (*helplessly*). I don't know... I have to go...

Consoler leads Liza away.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Sit down!

ARKADIY (*challengingly*). Thank you, I am fine!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Up to you! Let's be clear: the company has nothing to do with it. Semenovich is to blame, he was negligent egregiously! But he is part-time here!

ARKADIY. Who is Semenovich?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Autopsist!

ARKADIY. So what?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Now he is your family! He verified your departure without autopsy!

ARKADIY. What did he verify?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Your departure!

ARKADIY (*owlishly*). What departure?

NURSING ASSISTANT. You should ease off on drinking, my friend!

ARKADIY. You are driving me nuts! Explain me where I am, who undressed me and where my clothes are?

NURSING ASSISTANT. You are in a mortuary, blockhead! Mortuary! The mortuary of the funeral house "Paradise"! We will bury you in an hour!

ARKADIY (*turning white*). No more trifling, please!

Nursing Assistant kneels before him, looking at his toe tag.

NURSING ASSISTANT. 3715! (*Running up to the table, shaking the papers*).

And here 3715! Are you Arkadiy Ovsyannikov?

ARKADIY. I am.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Do you have any questions? No questions!

ARKADIY. And what paper is this?...

NURSING ASSISTANT. Your death certificate! You are dead! Do you understand, you, idiot?! Dead!

Arkadiy stands stock-still, then sits down on the floor slowly, fainting.

Bother it!

The door opens, Uncle Pasha wearing toque blanche and cook`s suit.

UNCLE PASHA (*gaily*). Who has to be washed? This one?... And why is he on the floor?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Uncle Pasha, don`t touch him! He... is... false!

UNCLE PASHA. What do you mean?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Well, he... is still breathing!

UNCLE PASHA. Holy shit! And who am I making 26 persons funeral banquet for?

NURSING ASSISTANT. For him. But the funeral banquet seems to be cancelled.

UNCLE PASHA. No way! You should see the table I set! (*Leaning over Arkadiy*).

Actually people now are die-hard!.. Maybe, this is dying convulsion? Do you remember, one corpse raised his hand lying in the coffin? As if warning at somebody? Do you remember?

NURSING ASSISTANT. This one is alive.

UNCLE PASHA. How could you miss it?

NURSING ASSISTANT. How could I miss it?

UNCLE PASHA (*Having guessed*). Semionych?

NURSING ASSISTANT. For the second time, can you believe it? He was rushing to a football match! The judge will not whistle without him!

UNCLE PASHA. Yes, Semionych is a dumbass! And my pate this time!

Mouthwatering! I've got a problem with steaks, but the pate is cheezy! Shall we call the chief?

NURSING ASSISTANT. You call him! He has been furious since this morning! His wife seems to have caught him on Luska! Fucking cunt chaser! He does not know to hide!

UNCLE PASHA (*Looking at Arkadiy*). Well, we are dancing round this live-lure for no reason at all.

NURSING ASSISTANT. And the main thing is – what a barefaced family! Old hat woman, bargaining on the price! No money, she said, everything burned away! Shorten the menu, cancel the orchestra, or I will lie down in the coffin myself!

UNCLE PASHA. It is clear!.. “Cold shower”! She may demand her advance payment!

NURSING ASSISTANT. She won't get anything from me! Have we dug the grave? We have! Has the hearse arrived? It has! And the transportation, Consoler, master of ceremonies? And I even did not mention the “box”! Varnish, silk, bronze handles!..

UNCLE PASHA. Where is she?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha is walking with her.

UNCLE PASHA. This is good. This one will walk with her so good that she will even forget the corpse!.. Maybe, she will forget about the advanced payment as well?

NURSING ASSISTANT. In a transport of joy one will definitely remember about the advanced payment!

UNCLE PASHA. Wait, let me ponder. And what if I turn a record? The funeral repast will be announced as a banquet on the occasion of a blissful resurrection? Why? Today miracles are not so rare!

NURSING ASSISTANT. And the grave?

UNCLE PASHA. If there is a gap, something will fill it!.. Perhaps the heaven will give us somebody! Don't panic! Bring your "corpse" to consciousness and I will find Grisha, let him work upon the widow. She needs this fruit drink like a fish needs a bicycle!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Do you really think so?

UNCLE PASHA. When a boozer kicks the bucket, it is relief and a great economy for a family! Go dip! You are a philosopher, aren't you?

Uncle Pasha goes away. The Nursing Assistant, sighing, is reaching out to get the bottle, but, having a look at the lying body of the "corpse", thinks better of drinking. He is looking for liquid ammonia in the desk, opens it and, bending over him, gives it to Arkadiy to smell. Moaning, the "corpse" raises his head.

NURSING ASSISTANT. "Arise, ye prisoners of starvation"! The floor is of cement, you will catch a disease! Come on!

He helps Arkadiy to sit down on a chair.

ARKADIY. Holy shit!.. Holy shit!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Right you are, "holy shit"! How much have you knocked back yesterday? A liter? Two?

ARKADIY. Hold on! So, if I wouldn't have picked myself back up, you would have buried me?!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*with sarcasm*). Only waist-deep!

ARKADIY. You should to be convicted for that! Murderers!

NURSING ASSISTANT. According to the documents you are dead! Everybody completely ignores you! Both society and retirement fund!

ARKADIY. And who are you?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Chief medical officer. But with huge powers! I wash you up, dress you up, watch the schedule, and to sum up, give ultimate send-off.

ARKADIY. Medical officer and did not notice I am alive?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Bug off! Be thankful that it's not the done thing in our office to take work home!

ARKADIY. What work?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. The autopsy of the deceased!

Arkadiy reflexively looks under the sheet.

ARKADIY (*terrified*). Autopsy?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Don't worry! Yesterday was a football. The Czechs lost, you won. Semionych cuts the corpse wide, wholeheartedly.

ARKADIY. What the devil!.. Where are my clothes?

NURSING ASSISTANT. On the hangers!

ARKADIY. This is not my suit! I have never had a black suit!

NURSING ASSISTANT. The suit is branded! Well, without pockets, but why will you need the pockets in the great beyond?

ARKADIY. Where is my suit?! Give me my trousers, my shirt, my shoes!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Don't shout! You may shout at home! Your wife took your clothes yesterday!

AHRADIY. And a purse? Cell phone? Keys from my flat, at last?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Your wife has everything. She has your wedding band also.

ARKADIY. My wedding band?! (*looks at his hand*). And... what for?

NURSING ASSISTANT. What the hell will you dig gold into the ground? It can be sold or used for dental crowns.

ARKADIY (*sits down*). My God, horrors!.. Horrors!..

NURSING ASSISTANT. Why to exaggerate? Horror has different elements!

ARKADIY. What should I do now?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. It's a good question! I also don't know what to do with you! According the documents you are done! You are not in the voting list, you are stricken from there!

ARKADIY (*suddenly*). Why are you referring to me with the informal "you"?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*surprised*). For me the dead are like family!.. Refer to me with the informal "you" also! We can even drink brotherhood.

Moves the bottle up to him, takes another glass.

ARKADIY (*terrified*). N-no! Oh, please, no!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Ill-considered choice.

ARKADIY (*firmly*). I will not drink anymore! Never in a million years!

NURSING ASSISTANT. The boss calls the shots! And I will take twenty drops.

Having poured vodka into the glass, drinks up, screwing up his face and smelling the leftovers of the sandwich.

Frankly speaking, this is the second screw-up in our firm. If there is a football match in the evening, he is out of his mind since the early morning! “Corner”, “penal”, “out”!

ARKADIY (*stubbornly*). Call Liza!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Why? Let her walk outdoors, let her think. She hoped that you were dead and she already had plans for her romantic life, freedom was looming forward and suddenly you appeared before her! Do you want to leave? No problem! But without the advanced payment.

ARKADIY. How much did you fleece from her?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Listen what I will tell you! Our funeral house doesn't turn out potboilers. We are not “Anubis”. Here in “Paradise” everything is first-class. Wreathes, funeral repast, I don't even talk about the “box”.

ARKADIY. What “box”?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Coffin, what don't you understand?

ARKADIY. Man, something doesn't go over your head! The funeral is cancelled! Do you understand? Can-cel-led!

NURSING ASSISTANT. It depends! You can cancel the wedding, the divorce, the engagement! The funeral cannot be cancelled! You can ask anyone! Well, we will not bury you, but when the process started, the locomotive is hard to stop. The braking length is very long!

ARKADIY. I am alive! Alive! I don't give a damn about your funeral house! I thumb my nose at your processes! I even don't know how I came to be here! You may have hit me over my head and then brought here to fleece money from Liza?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. You shouldn't have got pig-drunk!

ARKADIY. It is not your business! I was drinking for my own money!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Boozing is a social problem! People like you are a dishonor to the country! Even officials are already tired to fight with you!

Pause.

ARKADIY (*complainingly*). I want to go home!

NURSING ASSISTANT. You will go there. But after your wife`s signing the act of provided services! There has to be order in everything! Do you know what I noticed? People are negligent about the finishing line. One didn`t make a will and now all the family is squabbling among themselves and run from one TV show to another, another one didn`t nail the coat-hanger in the corridor. He was putting it off till the next day and one night – bang, heart attack! And the coat-hanger is in the corner, waiting for the new owner to nail it.

ARKADIY (*with a stupid air*). What owner?

NURSING ASSISTANT. How old is your wife?

ARKADIY (*with hostility*). What business is it of yours?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Just asking. She looks ok, not to everyone`s taste. Will you make her lie down next to you? It is not ancient Egypt! And you are not a pharaoh to bury your household with you.

The door opens, Liza enters, accompanied by the Consoler.

CONSOLER. Valya, Liza and I talked regarding the “box”. He should lie down and try it. The one you chose seems to be a bit short.

ARKADIY. What do I have to try?!

LIZA (*frightened*). This is him... I have nothing to do with it!

Uncle Pasha runs in.

UNCLE PASHA. Valya, I am afraid we don`t have sufficient vodka! Give me the car keys, I`ll pop into the shop!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Hold on with vodka!

UNCLE PASHA (*summing up the situation*). I`ve got it! But the funeral repast, by the way, is ready! You may try it already!

Uncle Pasha leaves.

ARKADIY. Liza! We are going home now!

CONSOLER. And the funeral?

ARKADIY. How much did you pay?

LIZA (*humbly*). Seven hundred dollars...

NURSING ASSISTANT. "Anubis", by the way, charges a thousand and a half!
And the quality of services is the lowest of the low! And the coffins are made of plywood!

CONSOLER. Last week at their funeral repast everybody got intoxicated, by the way!

ARKADIY. What funeral repast?! (*To the Consoler*). Take him away, or I'll go crazy!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha, take a walk!

CONSOLER (*proudly*). Easy peasy! Liza, my dear, do you want me to show you how the "boxes" are varnished?

ARKADIY (*fiercely*). Liza is staying here!

CONSOLER (*to Liza, gibingly*). Has he always been that jealous or this occurred to him only after death?

ARKADIY. Get out!!!

CONSOLER (*kisses Liza`s hand*). Doesn`t your heart hurt? No?.. Just so you know, I am outside the door. Don`t be afraid of anything and anybody! I am there for you!

The Consoler goes out.

ARKADIY (*aggressively*). How long have you known him?

LIZA (*in a weak voice*). Whom?

ARKADIY. The clown wearing the top hat!

LIZA. He was given to me in the firm. That is, assigned...

ARKADIY. What for?

NURSING ASSISTANT. He is a Consoler. Taking care about the widows is his responsibility!

ARKADIY (*to Liza*). What is his name?

LIZA. Grisha, I guess...

ARKADIY (*sarcastically*). Perfect! He kisses her lips, her hands, calls her “my dear Lizzy” and she even doesn’t know his name!

LIZA. Arkadiy...

ARKADIY. What – Arkadiy?! I have been Arkadiy for fifty years!

NURSING ASSISTANT. You will figure out who is Arkadiy at home!

ARKADIY. Right you are! We are leaving!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*gibingly*). Like this?

ARKADIY (*fumbling*). We will take a taxi! Liza, let’s go!

LIZA. Arkadiy, we cannot leave.

ARKADIY. Why? Sign the act of provided services and let’s go from here! I am cold!

LIZA (*after a pause*). The guests are waiting.

ARKADIY. Which guests?!

LIZA. Neighbors. My sister. Uncle Voldemar from Sudak.

ARKADIY. And why did this one barge in?

LIZA. To the funeral. In the end he is your family...

ARKADIY. Ah! I owe him two hundred dollars! Is this worth going that far?! Cheapskate!

LIZA. Gosha Gingerjack promised to come also.

ARKADIY (*terrified*). Gingerjack?! How did he find out?!

LIZA. He came at night with his gangsters. He was looking for you.

ARKADIY. And you?!

LIZA. I said you were dead.

ARKADIY. Did he believe you?

LIZA. He didn’t. But he said he would get you even in the great beyond!.. My God, how much do you owe him?

ARKADIY. Don’t ask me! It is better to die!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Will you sign the act?

ARKADIY. Tell me, do you have a back-door entrance?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*carefully*). Any problems?

ARKADIY. This is not a problem! This is a catastrophe! (*walking round the room*). What should I do?

LIZA. Also people from the bank came.

ARKADIY. And how did they find out?!

LIZA. I called them. I said you were dead, that is why you would not return the credit. They were screaming! Screaming that you died on purpose to bankrupt their bank! They required your death certificate immediately to write the credit off as a loss. And if you are alive, they will take away the pledge, that is the flat.

ARKADIY. Where is my death certificate?

NURSING ASSISTANT. I am sorry for interrupting, but I don't recommend you to play with the bank. We had a case when one debtor died without any announcement! The director of the bank together with the cashier burst into our office to cut the kidney of the decedent!

ARKADIY. Why?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Kidneys are in great demand nowadays.

ARKADIY. But this is gangsterism!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Credits, by the way, are not given by Philharmonia! There is even a book about the bankers. It is called "White-collar gangsters"! When I am passing by my bank – my heart leaps into my boots!

The Consoler enters.

CONSOLER. The people wants the departed to be shown!

Pause.

ARKADIY. E..eh... Did Gingerjack come also?

CONSOLER. Naturally! I didn't even know that you were keeping friends with local mafia! (*to the Nursing Assistant*). Valya, shall I announce that the funeral is cancelled or the departed will great the guests himself?

ARKADIY. Hold on! The funeral is not cancelled! Not cancelled!

LIZA. Arkadiy!..

ARKADIY (*to the Nursing Assistant*). Did she pay you?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. I even made her a discount!

ARKADIY. Start then! Why are you staring at me? I cannot go there! I'll be your client in no time! I need to be buried! Well, not buried, but... symbolically!.. (*desperately*). Use your imagination!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*to the Consoler, meaningfully*). Let`s do it at “force majeure”?

CONSOLER. And what if Gingerjack requires to open the “box”? He, by the way, came with all his gang! About twenty persons.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Let`s take the “box” with a coded lock!

CONSOLER. Are you crazy?! Only one lock costs three hundred dollars!

NURSING ASSISTANT. They will pay the remainder!

ARKADIY. We will pay! We will!

LIZA. Arkadiy, we don`t have money!

ARKADIY. Shut up, Liza, shut up! I will find money! But tell me what you are going to do? For me to understand!

NURSING ASSISTANT. This is another thing! I am not a stranger to you! (*to Arkadiy*). I saw you in the nude! Well, we had a similar case. That is why we wrote in the agreement “force majeure”. We will start paying last respects...

CONSOLER. Good God!

ARKADIY. Shut up! Let the man speak! Go on, Valentin... What is your last name?

NURSING ASSISTANT. It doesn`t matter! I will continue. The funeral will be fictitious! If there are fictitious marriages, who can forbid fictitious funeral? Nobody! Life is a pure invention! Did you hear about matrix? I in person like this idea. So, we will carry out the closed “box”. The coffin, as you say. Liza explains to the family, that you are not fit to look at. She wants your friends and family to remember you the way you were alive – gay and cheerful boozier.

LIZA. He didn`t drink before this!

ARKADIY. I didn`t! Only on holidays.

NURSING ASSISTANT. It doesn`t matter! So, we are burying the empty coffin. That is the “box”. The rest – orchestra, speech, funeral repast will be full-scale.

When the guests get sloshed, you get out of here, get home and then disappear for about two weeks. You may go to Bahamas or Uryupinsk – it does not matter! For this time somebody more significant, than Arkadiy, will die and everybody will forget about him! And when everyone is engrossed by the international politics and ditch their nerves at the Eurovision selection, you will come back like nothing even happened! Sure thing, there will be some people who will not understand this humor, but there are so many strange things in this world, that only life`s outsiders and young political theorists will be surprised!

CONSOLER. And I think that he has to lie down into the “box” and colour yourself slighted!

ARKADIY. You lie down there!

CONSOLER. And what if Gingerjack wants to kiss him goodbye? The uncle from Sudak will, and Liza will have to!

ARKADIY. No need to kiss me! Thank you!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha, hold on! (*to the Consoler*). Well, he will lie down into the coffin, they will kiss him, but then the coffin has to be closed and buried!

CONSOLER. Do you have an oxygen tank for diving? It will be enough for two hours! And when they are drunk, the guys will dig him out!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Arkadiy, what about your lungs? Are they fine?

ARKADIY. I`ve got asthma! (*Pause*). Can you leave me and Liza alone?

NURSING ASSISTANT. No problem. But don`t spin it out! In our business smell is needless! Grisha, let`s go to count the guests!

Consoler and Nursing Assistant go out.

ARKADIY. Liza... I don`t know how it happened! I am sorry...

LIZA. Why to talk about it now...

ARKADIY. When the firefighters left, I was going nuts! I know that somebody set the shop on fire, but who?! If this viper comes into my grasp!..

LIZA. Come down!

ARKADIY. Were you terrified?

LIZA. I was.

ARKADIY. I didn't mean it. I just wanted to get drunk until unconscious, but...
When I am thinking that everything burned away, a pile of debts, creditors!
Gingerjack, asshole, limped up!..

LIZA. We lived a wrong life, Arkadiy!

ARKADIY (*irritatedly*). And what life is right?! And tell me, please, why did you need such an expensive funeral?! To throw dust into everybody's eyes? Untie Klava could have prepared the funeral repast! And orchestra? You know – I am not exactly mad about Chopin! Solid despair!

LIZA. I wanted to bury you properly!

ARKADIY. Really?! You didn't even bury me and you already were kissing this idiot in the top hat!

LIZA. This "idiot" is working in this firm.

ARKADIY. I am not jealous, but there is common decency! (*in a weak voice*).
Let's suppose I died... But this is not the reason to kiss with every Tom, Dick and Harry the day of the funeral!..

LIZA. Stop it!

ARKADIY (*irritatedly*). Yes! I am a loser! Whatever I do – total "fiasco"! I cannot even die properly!

LIZA. You know best.

ARKADIY. I am sorry, Liza! I am sorry! I promise that everything is in the past!

LIZA (*hesitantly*). Do you promise?

ARKADIY (*passionately*). Yes! I promise! I swear!

LIZA (*sadly*). You swore so many times!

ARKADIY. But I didn't die before! And now, in the face of... It doesn't matter!
That is over, Liza! Finito el business!

LIZA. Don't worry. But there are people who cannot deal with business. Even a talented engineer!

ARKADIY. You are very kind!.. (*kisses Liza's hands*). You are an angel!
Everything will be different! I swear!

LIZA. Not everyone becomes an entrepreneur and what? They are fine!

ARKADIY. Yes, my dear, you are right! It is all over! No ideas! No credits! I can work as a parking watchman! Why not? Thousands of people work as watchmen, guards! In every third-rate establishment there is a person at the entrance and threateningly asks: Where? To whom?

LIZA. Well, but why to swing from one extreme to another?..

ARKADIY. You just open and close the gate. And at night you can read a book!.. Liza! I have not read anything for twenty years! Only way-bills and ad on the posts. I missed the new Dostoyevskiy or Remark! They have already appeared, haven't they?

LIZA. Come down! Now everything will be fine...

ARKADIY. Yes! You are right! A thousand times! Everything will be perfect!
The orchestra sounds – they are tuning up. The Nursing Assistant enters.

NURSING ASSISTANT. What did you decide?

ARKADIY (*decisively*). We'll bury the empty coffin! You will say that I cannot be kissed! Tuberculosis! Cholera!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Don't worry, you have "all inclusive"! (*to Liza*). We will stay here and you go to the public. The "box" is on a pedestal, the orchestra is ready! But this please, cry! Cry your eyes out! This creates a good impression with the public! You will be pointed at as an example!

LIZA. I can't...

NURSING ASSISTANT. You can't what?..

LIZA. I can't cry.

NURSING ASSISTANT. You have to, my dear Lizzy, you have to! Think about the prices on the markets, utility charges and the tears will appear!

ARKADIY. Lizzy, my dear, make an intention!

LIZA. My feet... I can't walk...

NURSING ASSISTANT. Grisha!

The Consoler appears.

CONSOLE. At your disposal, lord of the underworld!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Cut the shit! Help the widow to go to the public!

CONSOLEER (*to Liza*). I'm begging, my dear! Lean against my arm and think about the eterne!

The Consoler leads Liza away.

ARKADIY (*contemptuously*). Mountebank!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Mountebank or not, but he charges one hundred from every "corpse"! Well, Mr. "corpse"! We will stay here for two hours, maybe, we'll drink a glass or two!..

ARKADIY (*solemnly*). May the hand of him who gives me a drop wither!

NURSING ASSISTANT. As a person, who is related to medicine, I would like to mention that one should ease out of it.

ARKADIY. I will not let myself be tempted! I started a new life!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*knowingly*). Wow! Well, chess then?

ARKADIY. What chess?

NURSING ASSISTANT. They will carry out the "box" to the grave, then speeches, tears, funeral repast – about two hours, not less!

ARKADIY. Ah, that makes sense!.. I play chess badly. Damn it! Let`s play chess!..

NURSING ASSISTANT. Let`s leave pessimism at the door of our beautiful establishment! This is not a place for pessimism!

He takes out the chess, sets pieces.

Life is an amazing thing! But we notice it only at the finish line!

ARKADIY. Listen, why are you playing philosopher? "Afterlife, eternity! .."

NURSING ASSISTANT. For your information: I am a professional philosopher!

ARKADIY. Pull the other one! Philosopher!

NURSING ASSISTANT (*Pulls a diploma from the table*). Evening University of Marxism - Leninism. It existed in the era of universal chastity! Then it was liquidated, and how wrong it was! Marxism-Leninism disdained death, derided the afterlife, it is true. But he inspired humanity with such optimism that the death was talked about joyfully! Remember! Who has never dreamed of dying a hero, who accomplished a feat? And now? Death is not cared a cuss! The decedent

faded into insignificance, he is buried hastily and hypocritically! Where is the respect that a person was denied during his lifetime? Where is the thesis about the coming resurrection from the dead? Where is the worlds connection? By the way, we have a coffin with a mobile connection!

ARKADIY. What for?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Do you believe in miracles?

ARKADIY. I don`t.

NURSING ASSISTANT. In vain. You could have woken up five hours later. Do you tumble to it?

At that moment the trumpets roared and the orchestra began to play Chopin's Funeral March.

The Nursing Assistant and Arkadiy froze for a moment, Arkadiy even crossed himself with a starting.

ARKADIY. Oh my God!

NURSING ASSISTANT. And your wife says that you are atheists!

ARKADIY (*comes up to the door, listens*). Have I already been carried out?

NURSING ASSISTANT. You have, you have! By the way, our relationship is a remarkable example of dialectics!

ARKADIY. What dialectics?

NURSING ASSISTANT. For example, you want to live, but I have a completely different opinion on this subject! I have no gain from the alive! Everyone has their own benefits, and these benefits, having met at the firm "Paradise", entered into an irreconcilable conflict!

He pours vodka into a glass, is trifling with a chaser for a while.

Arkadiy himself is not averse to violating his vow, but he is afraid to say about that.

ARKADIY. Is this a long procedure?

NURSING ASSISTANT. What's the rush? The funeral repast, then nine days, then forty days are coming! .. By the way, I like a long farewell!

Raises his eyes to the ceiling, as if sending a greeting to someone, then drinks.

ARKADIY (*snorting*). What a philosopher! Do you really believe your nonsense is interesting to someone?

NURSING ASSISTANT. The opinion of the dead does not bother me at all.

ARKADIY. People don't care about your philosophy at all!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Whatever you say! The deep labyrinths of the human mind are not for you! You want to touch everything with your hands, but the work of the philosopher is invisible, it is as transparent as air! I will tell you a secret: when a brilliant scam with the construction of communism failed, I was not upset! (*scornfully*). This false equality, this gross flattery to technical progress, this hypocritical fanfare to the working class! And what about a bright future sitting in the entrenchment beyond the horizon and waving happily with its hand to you? Horrors! When everything went down the chute, we should have returned immediately to the ancient Greeks! Everything was simple and clear there! Olympus, gods and superstitious people! Instead we rushed happily along the ring road to the other side!

ARKADY. What do you mean ... along the ring road? To the airport, or what?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*with regret*). After all, will you have a drink?

ARKADY. I won't...

NURSING ASSISTANT. And I will – with pleasure!

The NURSING ASSISTANT drinks.

ARKADY. Why did the music stop?

NURSING ASSISTANT. (*looks at his watch*). The master of ceremonies may be announcing your posthumous characteristic! Then the word will be given to your relatives, colleagues, playmates, the priest will read the prayer, the “box” will be buried in the “garden”, the people will sit at the table, then we'll drink like big boys.

ARKADIY. Tell me, what you meant ... well, about the ring road?

NURSING ASSISTANT. Do you really care?

ARKADIY (*firmly*). I do!

NURSING ASSISTANT. You see, it's easier for me to explain this in Latin ...

ARKADIY. I can in English... Basic English.

NURSING ASSISTANT. I am sorry for you! So, in order to explain in lay language about the road a person runs along... Tell me, who do you consider yourself to be? A former engineer or the businessman who promoted Chinese crap to the domestic market? Revolution petrel or a freak of nature?

ARKADY. And what shall one live on?

NURSING ASSISTANT. What kind of life are you talking about? You did not live! You were sleeping, eating, making children and getting old with the woman who you might have once loved! And what is more important, you did not believe that it could ever end! Now imagine that you know the date of your death, that you need to have time to comprehend everything, to digest it, sum all the things up, sew a button, nail a hanger in the corridor! How now?!

ARKADIY (*after a pause*). When I was in the fifth grade, I fell in love with my school desk mate and dreamed of the graduation party, when we would go to the woods to see the sunrise ...

NURSING ASSISTANT. And at the graduation party you got drunk and she went to the woods with someone else ?! (*After a pause*). Do you want a piece of advice? Our Semionych gave you an incredible chance! And while they are lying through the teeth what a wonderful person you were, what a devoted friend, a faithful husband, a caring father, perform the audit of your miserable life and think what you will do tomorrow.

ARKADIY. I will live now for long. This is a country lore!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Nonsense! Semionych, when he probed your liver, said that you were not the object of interest for transplatoologists!

ARKADIY (*terrified*). Sort of... all the organs are sick?!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Healthy people don't exist. One has a corn, another has a horn! Do your tests, but do not look for the truth! Pharmacists are interested in you to be thoroughly addicted to the pharmacy! Okay, let's play chess!

ARKADY (*uncertainly*). Should I change clothes? ..

NURSING ASSISTANT. Wait a minute! (*Picks up the phone*). Uncle Pasha? You have my old tracksuit in your closet. Bring it, please!..

ARKADIY. I will return it tomorrow, don` t worry.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Philosophers don` t sweat on small stuff!

Uncle Pasha enters with the tracksuit in his hands.

UNCLE PASHA. Actually, I wanted to take him to the country. To bungle a scarecrow!

NURSING ASSISTANT. You will take it later. Don` t you see the client is freezing. He even refused vodka.

UNCLE PASHA. You are sick, are not you?

ARKADIY. You are sick yourself!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Please, no conflicts! Uncle Pasha, announce the menu!

UNCLE PASHA. Well, salad of course, sausage, pickles. Steaks, however, they smell a bit. Mashka forgot to put the meat into the fridge. But I will serve them after the break. They will be eaten like hot cakes!

ARKADIY (*Uncle Pasha, confused*). I could do a sandwich ...

UNCLE PASHA. The dead is not to be given a portion. You are to be given a glass with a crust of bread.

NURSING ASSISTANT. Uncle Pasha! He has “all inclusive”!

UNCLE PASHA. Got it. We` ll condescend!

ARKADIY. Anything but steaks, please!

UNCLE PASHA. Here we go! The dead are choosy about food!..

Uncle Pasha leaves.

ARKADIY. Where can I change?

NURSING ASSISTANT (*nods towards the door*). There.

ARKADIY (*scared*). N-no!

NURSING ASSISTANT. Go to the back room. Little door behind the screen!

ARKADY. OK!