

UPPGIVENHET

by Daniel J. Meyer

Translated from the Catalan play *Uppgivenhet* © 2018 by Daniel J. Meyer. English translation © 2025 by H. J. Gardner.

This translation has been carried out with the support of the Institut Ramon Llull.



CAST OF CHARACTERS

INGE: Woman, 25-27 years. Staff member at an asylum reception center in Sweden. Originally from Finland.

TARIK: Man, 20-22 years. Asylum seeker from Bosnia, born in Afghanistan. A center resident and volunteer.

IVAN: A young man, late teens, 17-18 years. Older brother to Petar. Seeking asylum at the center.

PETAR: Boy, early teens, 13-14 years. Younger brother to Ivan. Seeking asylum at the center.

SETTING

Sweden, around 2018

AUTHOR'S NOTE

There are stories that haunt you. 2018. A news article. An image in World Press Photo. An entirely unfamiliar topic. Rocks my world. Shocks me. Reverberates in my head. Suffering in so many places. Surfacing so many questions that became an obsession for me. Are we— but especially the youth these days— resigned to living in a world without hope?

And the response, the impetus behind this work, which is, a fight against this resignation. Living is not losing hope. By writing this play, the reverb changed to music. And through this music, I found a way to reconnect with hope. And through hope, to listen to and respect the necessary and varied silences within us all.

ABOUT THE SEPARATORS

The separators in the text (∞) have been placed to mark either a change in space or energy, or, a new speaker in the play.

SCENE 1

Inge enters the theatre via the house. She greets the audience members one by one and takes them to their seats.

Inge: (*Saying “Welcome” in various languages relevant to the audience.*) Välkommen. Willkommen. Bienvenidos. Dobrodošli. Salam. I’m so pleased to welcome you here today. Usually, we just do this automatically, without too much fuss, but if you could look me in the eyes... No pressure. Just know I truly mean what I say. From here on out, you have someone to trust.

INGE looks out over the audience. She smiles.

🎭

Inge: Now, yes. Välkommen. Willkommen. Bienvenidos. Dobrodošli. Salam. I’m so happy to welcome you here today. Know that I am here for you.

TARIK is seated in the audience and comments on the action.

Tarik: (*To the audience.*) I love orientation sessions. I mean, I’ve sat through plenty of them, because I like to see who’s here. And to find out who’s in charge...

🎭

Inge: (*To herself. Taking a deep breath.*) You got this.

Tarik: Oh! It’s a woman this time. Much better.

Inge: My name is Inge. And I know I just welcomed you all here today individually, but now I want to welcome you officially as well. This center is for you, to make your transition easier. I know a new language can be a struggle, so we’re here to help you with that. If there’s anyone here today who can’t understand what I’m saying, please raise your hand— Although I realize that if you can’t understand what I’m saying, you have no idea what I just said. But if there’s a friend or someone here you trust who can help, or somebody here who you can tell doesn’t understand, then by all means...

Tarik: Excuse me. I don’t think he understands you...

Inge: (*To an audience member.*) Hej. Do you understand? Sprechen Sie Deutsch?

A pause until the person answers Inge.

Tarik: I meant him. (*He points to IVAN.*)

Ivan: “My name is Ivan. Sorry... I do not understand you very well.”

Petar: Sorry. He doesn't speak your language. He understands. Just a little. But can't speak. I can translate for him later. My name is Petar. He is my brother. He is Ivan. You can continue...

Inge: Thank you. (*She smiles at PETAR.*)

🔊

(*Changing languages, the brothers address each other.*)

Petar: It cracks me up hearing you speak their language, bro.

Ivan: Yeah... I told you so, bro.

🔊

Inge: Well, I was just saying that everyone is here to help you in your new country. We want you to have everything you need to succeed. We teach language skills, and make...

Tarik: (*Speaking over INGE as he has memorized the speech.*) ...teach language skills, and make certain your arrival goes smoothly.

Petar: Sorry. I could not hear it all. He was talking. (*PETAR points to TARIK.*)

Inge: Thank you, Tarik. (*INGE smiles at TARIK.*) Sorry about that, Petar. I was just saying that we want to make certain your arrival goes smoothly, and we're here to help.

Petar: Thank you.

Inge: I'll go get a copy of the program of activities. So, please, just sit here for now. We will go over the schedule... And start tomorrow.

🔊

TARIK goes up to PETAR.

Tarik: You couldn't hear her because you were talking to each other. No bullshit, got it?

Ivan: "He is my little brother. Do not tell him how to behave. Clear?"

Tarik: I don't understand. What did he say?

Petar: That he wants to be your friend. That he doesn't have any friends here, and you seem nice.

IVAN stares at TARIK. PETAR smiles and TARIK does too.

Tarik: That's not what he said. Still, I'm going to believe you. I'm Tarik, from Bosnia, but my family is from Afghanistan.

Petar: I'm Petar. From Bosnia, too. This is Ivan.

Ivan: We're Serbs.

Petar: Our family is Serbian. We were born in Bosnia, in a Serbian town in Bosnia... Our town had Serbs and Bosnians. It's a mess! *(He laughs.)*

IVAN and TARIK stare at each other in silence. INGE returns.

Petar: She's back.

IVAN holds out a hand to TARIK. TARIK gives it a good look, then shakes it.

🌀

Petar: *(To the audience.)* My brother can be a real pain in the ass, for some reason.

🌀

Inge: Here we are. Please, everybody take a copy of the schedule. There are translated versions...

INGE works her way through the house handing out a program of activities to audience members.

🌀

Inge: *(To the audience.)* I know these are going straight into the trash because most activities are... Well, a mixed bag. And everyone just comes to learn the language, see if they can get financial assistance, find a place to sleep, and eventually, some kind of job. I don't blame them. I'd do the same. But... We want them to have the opportunity to learn how to make the transition more successful so maybe they can... Get ahead, more easily.

INGE gives PETAR a handout.

Inge: I like him. I see something special in his eyes. His eyes haven't lost all hope. *(Pause.)* I guess there's always some hope left. Otherwise, they wouldn't be here. They wouldn't make the journey. As for me... It's why I do this job. For hope.

🌀

Ivan: *(To PETAR.)* Ask her what we have to do to get a place to spend the night.



Petar: Miss Inge. My brother wants to know when they tell us where we are sleeping.

Inge: (*To IVAN.*) “I’ll tell you later. Do not worry. We have time.” (*To PETAR.*) For now, fill out the form and check which activities you’d like.



Tarik: (*To the audience.*) What am I supposed to check? I never know. I’ve done almost everything. Even so, they still let me show my face here, and I have fun. Well... Maybe not fun, but it passes the time. And I need my language skills to be perfect. I already think and dream in Swedish, and I’m pretty good at speaking it. But also, I like coming here... To not feel so alone. And because it reminds me what it felt like when I first came.

That’s really why I come. And they let me keep showing up here as long as I help the coordinator with whatever jobs he, or she, needs me for.

I like watching the new arrivals, especially the ones my age, full of hope and expectations, thinking life is going to get better. It relaxes and recharges me. Sure, they’ll be disappointed, but... For now they have that... What is it called... Drive. And for a while, it’s contagious.



INGE gathers the surveys.

Inge: Thank you. Now that you have chosen the activities you wish to participate in— and I’ll be the leader for the majority of them, or your teacher, if you prefer—the social worker is on her way to decide lodging, loans, and aid. Please wait here for now.

Welcome again. Thank you. See you tomorrow.

Exit INGE.

SCENE 2

TARIK goes over to IVAN and PETAR.

Tarik: You both have to line up at that window. There, they will tell you where you will sleep. Most likely you will stay here for a few months, then maybe they will give you an apartment when you are of age. But it will be a temporary place in a building where everyone is an immigrant, and it will only be for a limited time... A year or two. Good luck. See you tomorrow.