

“We declare you a terrorist...”

by
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PEOPLE

THE FSB OFFICER: 40s, an old school KGB agent stuck in a modern-day FSB world, living on the frontier of his home country. A bureaucrat. An idealist. A true believer.

THE WRITER: 40s, one of the hostages as well as the creator of *Nord-Ost*, the musical taken hostage by Chechen terrorists in October 2002. A dissident. A seeker.

KAYIRA: mid-20s, one of the Chechen women who helped hold the theater hostage by strapping a bomb to her body. Fiercely determined. Old beyond her years. Weary.

NINA: 16, dragged to *Nord-Ost* by her parents when she really just wanted to stay home and chat with her friends. A practical philosopher. A realist.

PLACES

A makeshift interrogation room near the border of Georgia & Chechnya

The Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow

TIMES

3 days in October, 2002

1 day in October, 2006

NOTES

A person only has an accent when speaking a language that is not his/her own. Though we are hearing them in English, all the characters in this play are speaking Russian to one another and so should *not* have accents. Kayira would speak Chechen at home and to the other militants; however, she would also have been a fluent Russian speaker like most Chechens. Moreover, I wrote this play with an American dialect in my head, not the rhythms of a native Russian speaker using English with an accent; so I ask one and all to refrain from trying out their Russian dialect. Thanks.

“We declare you a terrorist...” was originally produced in New York at the Summer Play Festival in July 2009.

“We declare you a terrorist...” was developed at the 2009 New Harmony Project.

“Are we, the lawful, fighting against the unlawful?
Or, are we battling their lawlessness with our own?”

“These are my immediate reactions jotted down in the margins of life as it is lived in Russia today. It is too soon to stand back...I live in the present, noting what I see and hear.”

“People call the newspaper and send letters with one and the same question: ‘Why are you writing about this? Why are you scaring us? Why do we need to know this?’

“I’m sure this has to be done, for one simple reason: as contemporaries of this war, we will be held responsible for it. The classic Soviet excuse of not being there and not taking part in anything personally won’t work.

“So I want you to know the truth. Then you’ll be free of cynicism.

“And of the sticky swamp of racism that our society has been sliding into.

“And of having to make the difficult decisions about who’s right and who’s wrong in the Caucasus, and if there are any real heroes there now.”

— Quotes from the writings of Anna Politkovskaya:
“We Declare You a Terrorist, The Anti-Terrorist
Politics of Torture in the North Caucasus,” *Putin’s
Russia*, and *A Small Corner of Hell, Dispatches
from Chechnya*

“We declare you a terrorist...”

There is a table with two chairs.
THE WRITER is sitting in one of the chairs.
His hands are cuffed behind his back with a
large zip tie. There is a black bag over his
head. He sits motionless.

Muffled voices are heard coming from an
adjacent room. THE WRITER turns his
head in the direction of the voices.
They become angry shouts.
They continue on for awhile. They stop.

Then more angry voices, shouts, and then a
very loud thud, like someone being slammed
into a wall.

Thud.
Shout.

Thud.
Shout.

Thud.
Silence.

Blackout.

Lights come back up on THE WRITER as
THE FSB OFFICER is removing the black
bag.

THE FSB OFFICER walks around to the
other chair. He sits.
He assesses THE WRITER.
He lights a cigarette. He smokes.
He smokes some more.

THE FSB OFFICER
Are you unhappy?

THE WRITER
What?

THE FSB OFFICER
What what?

THE WRITER

I was expecting...a different question.

THE FSB OFFICER

Like what?

THE WRITER

I don't know. Just something different.

THE FSB OFFICER

Well?

THE WRITER

I don't follow—

THE FSB OFFICER

Are you unhappy?

THE WRITER

I'm not...sure how to answer.

THE FSB OFFICER

It's pretty easy.

THE WRITER

Am I under arrest—?

THE FSB OFFICER

You're happy or you aren't.

THE WRITER

You didn't—

THE FSB OFFICER

It's a yes or no question.

THE WRITER

I'm...

I disagree. It's not that easy to answer.

THE FSB OFFICER

Well, maybe I can help?

THE WRITER

I doubt it.

THE FSB OFFICER

Can I at least try? You have to let me try.

THE WRITER

Do your worst.

THE FSB OFFICER

No-no, my best.

Let's see, you have a family, a wife and...

THE WRITER

Two daughters.

THE FSB OFFICER

Two? Hm...

And you're successful, right?

THE WRITER

I suppose.

THE FSB OFFICER

No. You are. You wrote a hit play. It won numerous awards. Sold thousands of tickets.

The Americans even want to translate it. Take it to Broadway.

No Russian writer has ever had a play on Broadway—

THE WRITER

Chekhov.

THE FSB OFFICER

Chekhov doesn't count. Chekhov is dead. Long dead.

You're alive. You live.

And that's something else to be happy about, right?

THE WRITER

I suppose.

THE FSB OFFICER

Do you wish you were dead?

THE WRITER

No.

THE FSB OFFICER

No?

THE WRITER

No.

THE FSB OFFICER

Are you certain about that?

THE WRITER

Yes.

THE FSB OFFICER

Because it's quite common. Survivor's guilt is quite common among people who have survived trying circumstances. You ask yourself why you lived when others died.

THE WRITER

That's not it—

THE FSB OFFICER

And on top of it all, you wrote the play. People came to see your play and died. And you lived. Maybe you started to think that you should be dead too. You want to die.

So, is that it? Do you want to die?

THE WRITER

I already answered.

THE FSB OFFICER

Did you?

THE WRITER

Yes.

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes, you answered? Or yes, you want to die?

THE WRITER

Yes, I answered. No, I don't want to die.

(silence)

THE FSB OFFICER

Okay-okay.

Problem is though, it doesn't add up.

THE WRITER

What doesn't?

THE FSB OFFICER

This sudden desire of yours to live.

THE WRITER

What doesn't add up?

THE FSB OFFICER

Your words are in opposition to your actions.

THE WRITER

No they aren't—

THE FSB OFFICER

We caught you though.

You were trying to get into Chechnya.

No one goes to Chechnya. Unless they are ordered to do so. Or if they are a terrorist and they want to kill Russians. Or if they want to die.

So tell me, which of these describes you?

THE WRITER

None of those.

THE FSB OFFICER takes out a knife.

THE WRITER

What are you—?

THE FSB OFFICER

Your hands.

THE WRITER tentatively holds out his hands. The FSB OFFICER cuts the cuffs.

THE FSB OFFICER

Why were you trying to get into Chechnya?

THE WRITER

I wasn't.

THE FSB OFFICER

You were sneaking through the bushes.

You had just crossed the border, a few meters into Chechnya.

THE WRITER

I had?

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes. Why were you sneaking into Chechnya?

THE WRITER

I wasn't, I was just out for a walk.

I didn't know I was so close.

THE FSB OFFICER

A walk?

THE WRITER

Yes.

THE FSB OFFICER

At night. A long way from the nearest town or village.

THE WRITER

Is that a crime?

THE FSB OFFICER

So what were you doing in Georgia?

THE WRITER

I came down for business. I was talking to some backers about starting up a new production of *Nord-Ost*.

And then I decided to go camping.

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes. We found your campsite.

Not very well-equipped.

THE WRITER

I like to rough it.

THE FSB OFFICER

It's October, pretty cold out there. I'd think you'd have some matches.

THE WRITER

I have a lighter. I was carrying it on me.

THE FSB OFFICER

Oh yes, we found that too.

Do you know how dangerous Chechnya is?

THE WRITER

I have an idea. But not personally, no.

THE FSB OFFICER

Borders in this part of the world are fairly porous,
not likely to lend you much safety.

THE WRITER

Probably good you found me then. I suppose I could've
wandered into a minefield or something.

THE FSB OFFICER

When we found you that's exactly where you were.

THE WRITER

...Oh.

THE FSB OFFICER

Minefields are known by the locals, that's why we were suspicious,
to see someone out there.

THE WRITER

Well...

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes.

It's against the law, you know, to cross an international border at a place other than an
official border crossing, even if you are a Russian citizen, just...going home.

THE WRITER

I'm sorry, really, it was an honest mistake.

THE FSB OFFICER

We don't take illegal crossings lightly.

THE WRITER

I know.

THE FSB OFFICER

Like you also knew that it was a minefield?
Because you did know. You knew that you were trying to cross into Chechnya illegally.

THE WRITER

No, I'm telling you, I wasn't—

THE FSB OFFICER reaches into a pocket

"We declare you a terrorist..."

and pulls out a plastic bag with a small piece of paper inside it.

THE FSB OFFICER

What's this then?

We found it on you.

THE WRITER

...It's nothing.

THE FSB OFFICER

There's Arabic writing on it.

Can you read it?

THE WRITER

No, actually. Can you?

THE FSB OFFICER

Do you know what it says?

(silence)

I have translators, I know what it says.

THE WRITER

Then I don't have to say it.

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes, you do. I don't know if you and I think it says the same thing.

THE WRITER

It's mine, yes. But it's—

It was a gift. It's not like it's some sort of—

What are you thinking? I mean, it's not a code—

THE FSB OFFICER

Tell me what it says.

THE WRITER

Why?

THE FSB OFFICER

Because I think it says that you're a piece of shit. I think it says that something happened to you inside that theater, that despite having your life threatened along with the lives of eight hundred others, that something got inside you, poisoned you, and turned you against your country. I think it says that you're a goddamned traitor and we caught you just in time.

THE WRITER

No, please don't—

THE FSB OFFICER grabs THE WRITER by the hair and forces his head down to the table. THE FSB OFFICER is shockingly calm through all this.

THE FSB OFFICER

I need reasons, motives.

I need to know what you're capable of and what you're planning to do.

I need to know about the woman, Bayroкова.

THE WRITER

I don't know who—

THE FSB OFFICER slams his hand down on the table.

THE FSB OFFICER

Kayira Bayroкова.

A shift. October 2002.

THE WRITER and NINA, a girl in her teens, are sitting near each other inside the theater. KAYIRA stands nearby but effectively out of hearing range.

NINA

I knew we should've gone to *42nd Street*.

THE WRITER

Why that play?

NINA

Isn't it obvious?

THE WRITER

But *42nd St.* is a boring, American fantasy.

NINA

42nd Street is a good show.

THE WRITER

And this isn't?

NINA

We have no business writing musicals like this. The Americans can. The Brits are pretty good. But this was sucking bad. Why? Did you like it?

THE WRITER

Yes, actually. Quite a lot. I'm involved with the production.

NINA

Did you build the sets or something?

THE WRITER

I wrote it.

NINA

Shit. Sorry.

THE WRITER

You should be.

NINA

No, I'm sorry that your play sucks so bad.

THE WRITER

Your parents must be very proud to have a child like you.

NINA

No, my parents were enjoying the play. At least my mom was.

THE WRITER

Well that's something.

NINA

But she likes anything with singing in it.

THE WRITER

Where are they?

NINA

The other side of the theater. We got split up when the Chechens moved us all down to the Orchestra seats.

THE WRITER

I'm sorry.

NINA

It's cool. I don't really want to listen to them freaking out anyway. My mom called me just to tell me that she and my dad thought this was all going to work out fine. But that's bullshit. I bet she called her sister to tell her where to find money for our funerals when we're all blown into a million fucking pieces— Is it weird that they're letting us use our cell phones?

THE WRITER

Maybe they're using us to get their "message" out.

NINA

Oh. Yeah, that's smart.
Fucking assholes.
Were you here...with anybody?

THE WRITER

No, my family's seen the play enough. They stayed home tonight.

NINA

Well, that's good.
There's a lot of us in here. How many do you think?

THE WRITER

The house was nearly full, plus the box office, facilities people, the musicians, actors, stagehands... Probably close to eight, nine hundred— I wonder if anyone managed to get out...

NINA

But there's not that many of them. Why don't we just leave?

THE WRITER

They have the guns, the bombs.
Each of those women has a bomb. Twenty?

NINA

Nineteen. I counted. And then I counted them again.

THE WRITER

There you go. People don't want to die.

NINA

So we just sit here and wait to be killed.

THE WRITER

Well go ahead, try to disarm one of them.

NINA

Yeah, I'll get right on that.

How are they going to manage all of us? How are we going to eat?

What if I have to use the bathroom?

THE WRITER

(looks at her seat)

NINA

No way. I'm not peeing in my seat.

THE WRITER

So maybe they'll organize bathroom trips if we swear to Allah we won't try to escape.

NINA

(fakes a laugh)

But do you think we'll be here long?

THE WRITER

I don't know.

NINA

You can tell me what you really think.

THE WRITER

I did.

NINA

My parents wouldn't tell me the truth either. They keep saying, "It's all right. We'll be fine."

THE WRITER:

What do you think?

NINA

I think we're all fucked

THE WRITER

No hope at all.

NINA

That's how these things always end, right?

THE WRITER

Sometimes there is hope.

NINA
If you say so.
But your play sucked.

THE WRITER
Thank you.

NINA
And not just because of this. It sucked on its own.
This just makes the whole night that much worse.
What were you thinking anyway?

THE WRITER
I was shooting for a Russian-born,
Russian-themed version of *Les Miz*.

NINA
Well, you blew it.

THE WRITER
Well, I'm very happy with it.
It won the Golden Mask—

NINA
Well you keep at it.

THE WRITER
Thank you. I will.

(silence)

NINA
I didn't even know the war in Chechnya was still going on.
Shouldn't we have won that by now?

THE WRITER
They're a very stubborn people I hear.

NINA
I don't have time for this though. I have so many—
I have things to do, you know? Shit, I really didn't want to be here tonight.

THE WRITER
And how do you think I feel? All these people are here because of my play.
I know many of them. We're friends.

NINA

So you think we're all going to die too.

During the following, KAYIRA moves closer to stand nearer to THE WRITER & NINA.

THE WRITER

Putin won't negotiate, but there are so many of us here. There are people from other countries, some Australians, I think—I overheard them at intermission. And this is Moscow, people will be watching, so Putin will have to be careful—more careful. We're civilians. He has to consider how things will go for him if he lets us die.

NINA

I hope you're right.

KAYIRA

You have to know your government won't negotiate. They'll storm the building and we'll set off the explosives. We came here to die. You should prepare yourselves for the same fate.

KAYIRA walks away.

THE WRITER & NINA look at each other.

A shift.

Back in the interrogation room.

THE FSB OFFICER has THE WRITER still pinned to the table.

THE WRITER

Kayira was one of them, one of the Chechens who held us hostage. We...talked a bit.

THE FSB OFFICER

Why?

THE WRITER

She was a mystery.

I was curious.

THE FSB OFFICER

And what did you learn?

THE WRITER

Nothing.

THE FSB OFFICER

That's a bad lie, even for a bad liar.
We know you talked to her for a long time.

THE WRITER

But I didn't know her, how could I? We were stuck together
for three days, we talked, sure. But everything about her,
everything she was before she walked into that theater, it's all just stories.
I needed something real, that's why I came to Chechnya.

THE FSB OFFICER releases **THE WRITER**.

THE FSB OFFICER

So you admit it. You were trying to get into Chechnya.

THE WRITER

(he nods)

THE FSB OFFICER

You lied to me.

THE WRITER

I was... I am...frightened.

THE FSB OFFICER

Why? What are you hiding?

THE WRITER

(no response)

THE FSB OFFICER

What happened in the theater?
Did she turn you? Convert you? To her religion,
her cause? Maybe you fell in love—
She was very beautiful and you fell in love with her?
Understandable but senseless; she's dead after all—

THE WRITER

We just talked.

THE FSB OFFICER

You just talked.
And then four years later you decided to pay her country a visit.