

“We declare you a terrorist...”

by
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PEOPLE

THE FSB OFFICER: 40-50s, 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: 45, 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.

MASHA: 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.

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.

PLACES

A makeshift interrogation room near the border of Georgia & Chechnya
The House of Culture Dubrovka Theatre in Moscow.

TIMES

3 days in October, 2002

1 day in October, 2003

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 given a finishing commission by Round House Theatre in Bethesda, Maryland. Ryan Rilette, Artistic Director; Ed Zakreski, Managing Director.

“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.

“We declare you a terrorist...” was developed by Tim J. Lord & West Hyler at the HERE Arts Center American Living Room Festival in August 2007.

“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*

A room in disrepair. A room that was built for some other purpose than it's currently serving.

Maybe there's a table and two chairs.

Maybe THE WRITER is sitting in one of the chairs.

But there is a definitely a rough-sewn bag over his head and his hands are cuffed behind his back with a large zip tie. 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.

THE FSB OFFICER is removing the bag from The Writer's head.

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...

THE WRITER

What?

THE FSB OFFICER

That's good, family is good.

Family is important.

...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.

I hear the Americans even want to translate it. Take it to Broadway.

No Russian writer has ever had a play on Broadway,
or the West End.

THE WRITER

The West End?

THE FSB OFFICER

London's "Broadway?"

THE WRITER

Yes, I know—

THE FSB OFFICER

You were just there, weren't you? Talking about a possible London production?

(No response.)

Weren't you?

THE WRITER

How did you—?

THE FSB OFFICER

Were you or were you not just in London,
talking to some...producer, about bringing your hit play to the West End?

THE WRITER

...He declined.

THE FSB OFFICER

That's too bad. I'd love to be able to say I'd met the first Russian to have a hit play in the
West End.

THE WRITER

...I wouldn't be the—

(FSB looks blankly back at him.)

Chekhov?

THE FSB OFFICER

Chekhov?!

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

Because of course you wrote the play—and produced it too. An impressario.

People came to see your play and died while you lived.

Maybe you started to think that you should be dead too. You *want* to die—

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.

THE FSB OFFICER

Okay-okay.

(A moment.)

This is going well, don't you think?

THE WRITER

...Yes?

A moment.

THE FSB OFFICER

Problem is though, it doesn't add up.

THE WRITER

What—?

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—

THE WRITER

I wasn't—

THE FSB OFFICER

My rational brain wants to believe there's been some colossal mistake, because no one goes to Chechnya—no peace-loving citizen of Mother Russia, no award-winning theater impresario surely—no one.

Unless they are ordered to do so, like our brave soldiers. Or our officers of the FSB—such as myself, men who care only about protecting our fellow citizens from the lawlessness of the Caucasus.

But that's not you—a talented, award-winning, theater impresario.

THE WRITER

No.

THE FSB OFFICER

There is another type of person who goes to Chechnya...

THE WRITER

Chechens?

THE FSB OFFICER

Fine. There are two other types of people who go to Chechnya, Chechens, and...

(No response.)

Terrorists, I'm sad to say. Terrorists who want to kill Russians...

And then I suppose there's yet another category of persons who might try to go to Chechnya: people who want to die. Because Chechnya is a good place to get oneself killed. If you're that type of person.

THE FSB OFFICER (CONT'D)

So tell me, which of these describes you?

THE WRITER

None of those.

THE FSB OFFICER

...

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 in London.

You were all set to go home.

And then you changed your ticket. To Tbilisi.

THE WRITER

A last minute vacation—

THE FSB OFFICER

To Chechnya—

THE WRITER

No, Georgia, the Caucasus Mountains. I've always wanted to visit them—

THE FSB OFFICER

So you could slip into Chechnya? Undetected?

THE WRITER

Why do you think I was trying to get into Chechnya?

THE FSB OFFICER

Because when we found you, sneaking through the bushes,

THE FSB OFFICER (CONT'D)

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

I was camping.

THE FSB OFFICER

Oh yes.

We found your campsite.

Not very well-equipped.

THE WRITER

I like to rough it.

Is that a crime?

THE FSB OFFICER

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

THE WRITER

I have a lighter—had one—

I was carrying it on me. Did you find it?

THE FSB OFFICER

Yes.

THE WRITER

...Did you find something else?

A moment.

THE FSB OFFICER

Do you know how dangerous Chechnya is?

THE WRITER

...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 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 (more)

THE FSB OFFICER (CONT'D)

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, most of all,

I need to know what you're planning to do.

THE WRITER

I'm not—

THE FSB OFFICER

Let's start with 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 Dubrovka theater.

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

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

Why that play?

MASHA

Isn't it obvious?

THE WRITER

42nd Street is a boring, American fantasy.

MASHA

42nd Street is a good show.

THE WRITER

And this isn't?

MASHA

We have no business writing musicals like this. The Americans can. The Brits are good—I love *Les Miz*. But this show sucks.

THE WRITER

Nord-Ost is one of a kind, been running for nearly two years now—lots of kids your age love it—

MASHA

Then they have shitty taste.
You're an old man. Were you actually enjoying it?

THE WRITER

Yes!
And I'm not old!
And yes. I like this play—quite a lot actually.
Also, I would add, I'm involved with the production.

MASHA

Did you build the sets or something?

THE WRITER

I wrote it.

MASHA

Shit.

THE WRITER

And I'm the producer.

MASHA

Sorry.

THE WRITER

You should be.

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

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

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

—

MASHA

But she likes anything with singing in it.

THE WRITER

...Where are they?

MASHA

The other side of the theater. I was still in the lobby when the Chechens stormed in. We got split up.

THE WRITER

...I'm sorry.

MASHA

It's cool. I'm sure they're freaking out right now and I don't want to listen to that. My mom called me just to tell me that she and my dad thought this was all going to work out fine—such 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— It's weird they're letting us use our cell phones, right?

THE WRITER

It's smart.

They know the authorities won't broadcast what's going on in here, but if they let us call our families or the newspapers... their message is more likely to get out. People might start thinking about the war in Chechnya again.

MASHA

For real?

THE WRITER (nodding)

Some things are better than Soviet days, but this...

MASHA

That is smart.

MASHA (CONT'D)

Fucking assholes.

Were you here...with anybody?

THE WRITER

No. My family stayed home tonight.

MASHA

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 seven, eight hundred—

I wonder if anyone managed to get out...

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

They have the guns, the bombs. Set traps on the main doors.

And each of those women has a gun and a bomb. Twenty?

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

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

MASHA

So we just sit here and wait to be killed.

THE WRITER

You're welcome to disarm one of them.

MASHA

Yeah, I'll get right on that.

How long do you think this lasts?

THE WRITER

I don't know—

MASHA

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)

MASHA

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

THE WRITER

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

MASHA

(fakes a laugh)

We're all going to die, aren't we?

THE WRITER

I don't know—

MASHA

You can tell me what you really think.

THE WRITER

I did.

MASHA

Nobody wants to admit the truth.

THE WRITER

What do you think is going to happen?

MASHA

I think we're all fucked

THE WRITER

No hope at all.

MASHA

That's how these things always end, right?

THE WRITER

Sometimes there is hope.

MASHA

If you say so.

But your play sucked.

THE WRITER

Thank you.

MASHA

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*.
I'm surprised you didn't like it—

MASHA

I didn't like it because you blew it—

THE WRITER

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

MASHA

Well you keep at it.

THE WRITER

Thank you. I will.

(silence)

MASHA

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.

MASHA

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? Everyone in here, they're here because of my play—
The cast, the crew... We've been building this, together, for years—we're family.
That's why I ran into the theater when I realized what was going on.

MASHA

You ran *in*?

THE WRITER

I was in my office when they began shooting

MASHA

You could have escaped?

THE WRITER

You're my guests. I couldn't abandon you.

MASHA

...Because you think we're all going to die too?

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

THE WRITER

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

MASHA

I hope you're right—

KAYIRA

We all 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 & MASHA 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

I thought if I could get close to her, win her trust, maybe I could stop her setting off her bomb

THE FSB OFFICER

Don't lie to me

THE WRITER

I'm not!

THE FSB OFFICER

You talked for an awfully long time.

THE WRITER

How do you—?

THE FSB OFFICER

I'm asking the questions here.

What did you talk about?

What did you learn from her?

THE WRITER

Nothing—

THE FSB OFFICER

That's a bad lie, even for a bad liar.

THE WRITER

Please! I'll tell you all about it, just,
please, let me up.

THE FSB OFFICER releases
THE WRITER.

THE FSB OFFICER

You talked to quite a few of the Chechens during the siege,
had quite a bit of freedom to move about.

THE WRITER

I told them who I was. I tried to make them feel comfortable, yes,
because I knew what was going on, what our chances were.

I thought that if I could keep them calm it would give all of us a better chance of surviving.

THE FSB OFFICER

Why did you want the Chechens to survive?

THE WRITER

That's not—

You know that's not what I meant.

THE FSB OFFICER

How do you know what I know or what I don't?

THE WRITER

Please, just let me—

THE FSB OFFICER

Why? Why should I "just let you?"

Why should I believe you when you've already lied to me?

THE WRITER

...Can we start over please?

THE FSB OFFICER

...Yes.

You were trying to get into Chechnya, yes or no?

THE WRITER

Yes.

THE FSB OFFICER

You lied to me.

THE WRITER

(nods)

THE FSB OFFICER

Why? What are you hiding?

THE WRITER

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

THE FSB OFFICER

You've no reason to be frightened.

I'm an officer of the law. My job is to protect the people of our beautiful country.

You want me to succeed, yes?

THE WRITER

Of course.

THE FSB OFFICER

Then you only need to trust me, friend...

Assuming that you and I want the same thing.

Now...

One year ago you met this woman

and talked to her over the course of a very stressful
two and a half days.

Last week you were supposed to return home,
but you changed your ticket, flew to Tbilisi and...

THE WRITER

And I hired a guide to sneak me into Chechnya—

I understand that's...wrong—

THE FSB OFFICER

Illegal in fact—

THE WRITER

But I can explain it—

THE FSB OFFICER

Please don't.

Let's rewind to the theater.

THE WRITER

Why?

THE FSB OFFICER

Because I want to know what happened to you in there,
during your conversation.

Did you sympathize with her?

Or maybe you fell in love—

She was very beautiful, and you fell in love with her?

I could see that happening, completely understandable
but senseless of course—

THE WRITER

No. We just talked.

THE FSB OFFICER

You just talked.

And now you and I are talking on the frontier of our country.

THE WRITER

I thought I could meet people, maybe what's left of her family,
her friends—

THE FSB OFFICER

Other terrorists?

THE WRITER

Just people.

THE FSB OFFICER

"People."

Then what?

THE WRITER

Maybe I could help—help rebuild, spark some dialogue,
I thought I could come home with whatever I learned,
get our leaders to listen,
whatever it took to...make things better