

My Friend Seda Suleimanova, Kidnapped by Her Chechen Family, Could Still Be Alive. Please Help Her

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Seda Suleimanova (R) and Lena Patayeva. **Courtesy photo**

I am a friend of Seda Suleimanova, who was abducted from St. Petersburg. Right now there are rumors that she has been murdered by her relatives. Otherwise, if she is alive, she is still being held captive by the very same people who threatened to violently kill her.

I met Seda when I was searching for a roommate. For the first few days of our life together she was somewhat avoidant and reluctant to open up. Regular small talk like asking where she was from seemed to make her anxious. I tried not to push Seda, yet I was also curious about her past.

Unfortunately, dramatic events meant I found out. A year ago, Seda's relatives found her and tried to kidnap her. That time she was lucky to get away, but she had to quit her job and move

to another place. However, even though we were no longer living together, we became friends.

I have now known Seda for just over a year, which might not seem like a long time. However, she became a closer and more reliable friend than those I have known for years.

Last summer a terrible incident, the kind that leaves a person shaken and disoriented, happened to me. Seda was one of the few whom I asked for help without any hesitation. Due to certain reasons, I can't talk about what happened or how Seda helped me. But I can say with certainty that she saved me, and she did it selflessly, and never asked anything in return.

Seda Suleimanova is a kind, delicate, sincere, and caring person. This world would be a better place with more people like her in it.

At the same time, I know her to be brave, willful, and ready to fight for her own freedom. It takes a lot of courage and certainty to even consider running away from a traditional Chechen family while being fully aware of the lethal cost of failure.

During these dreadful times, people in Russia are afraid of their own shadows, not to mention something like the described escape. The walls have ears, the shadows have eyes, and even a fly might be a tiny drone with a camera disguised as an insect. We are way more paranoid than we ever were, we are afraid to do things that are not even prohibited yet.

On Feb. 1 I staged a [solo protest](#) in front of the St. Petersburg Prosecutor's Office to draw attention to Seda's fate. I managed to stand with a poster for almost an hour before finally getting arrested. During that hour many strangers passed, but no one chose to stop and talk to me.

I know a lot of people here in Russia who want to support Seda. But they are too anxious to help in even the safest and most basic ways, like reposting the news, sharing the news and anonymous poems about Seda online.

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Right now, I'm constantly told I'm brave. People say that staging a solo protest to defend my friend's right to life and freedom is heroic in modern Russia.

I'm sad to hear such compliments. Standing up for your friends or loved ones despite a possible danger is not heroism. I believe it should be considered natural. Yet, we are living in an upside-down caricature of reality. To all those who think I'm brave, let me remind you that staging a protest and talking to journalists will not put your life or freedom in danger.

On the other hand, there is Seda. She chose to run away, to be free, to live in St. Petersburg, to have Russian friends, and to love a Russian man. All that time she lived under the threat of her own family murdering her. Even if she is alive right now, she is experiencing something far worse than any Russian prison.

Seda Suleimanova may be a 26-year-old woman, yet her heart contains more courage than

most. She is a hero of our time: an ordinary person, fighting for their right to love and be free during the trying times.

Seda did not wish harm on anyone. She never wanted her happiness to be at the expense of someone else's. Even when she ran away from her relatives, she never wanted to bring harm upon them. As such, she didn't talk about her life in Chechnya and never went to the police.

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After her relatives first found her in St. Petersburg, she was left without a job and had to seek help from the NC SOS Crisis Group. They provided everything she needed, including a safe place to be. But she couldn't search for a new job or even see friends. After a few months, she decided to leave the organization and live on her own.

I've been asked many times why she chose to stay in Russia instead of continuing with the NC SOS program that would have allowed her to escape abroad.

My answer is that Seda underestimated the influence her family actually had. We all did.

She felt certain that her relatives were just not rich and influential enough to keep searching and plotting to strike after the first abduction attempt. She never expected her unknown family from a small village to suddenly find enough money and leverage to launch a manhunt so far away from Chechnya.

Besides, her decision was informed by how much she wanted to stay in Russia. She was afraid to spend the rest of her life somewhere unknown, constantly running from one place to another.

She also had another reason — her relationship with Stanislav. They met in St. Petersburg and quickly became very close. Seda confessed to Stanislav that she was a runaway from Chechnya. But that didn't scare him. They were ready to start a family and have children. Stanislav was certain in his intentions: he introduced Seda to his family and hoped that the wedding would help to straighten out Seda's relationship with her family.

When remembering all of this today, I believe we were so naive. Seda, her fiancé, all our friends and I were living in a delusion, unaware of what the next day might bring.

I clearly remember the warm summer evening, some 10 days before Seda was kidnapped. She came to my place, to the very same flat we used to rent together.

That evening we both were carefree young women. We were living in the moment, enjoying the warmth of the setting sun, a mouth-watering meal and a cold soda, admiring the view from the roof of my building. We were talking nonsense. We were talking about the seemingly never-ending renovations at Stas and Seda's place. We were talking about my unrequited love for this guy. We were living as if there were no wars, murders and tortures, as if this summer and our youth would never end, as if nobody would abduct one of us in just 10 days from then.

Today, all of these images feel like part of someone else's life. Today Seda won't be thinking about those renovations. She is probably thinking about how to act so she will be beaten and

tortured less. Or maybe she is not thinking about anything anymore and is lying in soft black soil — in an unnamed grave.

Today, I have forgotten about my job and my loved ones, and spend all day digging through the web to find proof that my best friend is still alive. Our friends are living through the same horror.

One day there is news that makes us cry and believe that Seda is gone. The other day there is news which, again, makes us cry, but this time from joy because it gives us hope that Seda is still alive. Such mood swings would drive anyone insane.

I'm fully aware that you don't know Seda like I do. You've never seen her, never hugged her when meeting, never heard her laughter nor shared happiness or despair with her. For you, she may as well be nobody, just another person from the news who got into trouble.

I know how it works. You scroll through your feed and stop for a couple of seconds to take a look at Seda's picture. Maybe you'll leave a sad emoji in response. But after that, you'll keep scrolling. All I ask from you today is to make an exception and not skip this news. I am asking you to do everything you can to help this girl survive.

I address you, as by now even the smallest of deeds might prove useful. I need your help. Because only the strong publicity might save Seda Suleimanova.

If you're active on social networks, please share the news about Seda. Repost, retweet, leave a comment and share the news through platforms that haven't published anything about her yet. If you know any journalists, influencers, politicians, or anyone else with power, please ask them to [contact me](#) or the NC SOS Group to help us.

Seda deserves to live just like any of us do – and she might still be alive. Maybe we will manage to save her life. As the saying goes, by saving the life of a single person, you save the whole world.

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