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PUTIN AND THE PRIEST

Vladimir Putin, President of Russia, at confession, inside the Transfiguration Cathedral in St. Petersburg, Russia. Patriarch Kirill of Moscow, a priest and head of the Russian Orthodox Church, is a long time colleague of Putin's and an outspoken proponent of the invasion of Ukraine. He listens to Putin profess his philosophy and confess his sins before he is to receive communion the following day, Easter Sunday. They sit near lectern, not far from altar at front of the church.

PUTIN

(To himself)

O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? From this man that I am? Da, there is a war going on within me. Nyet, I dare not tell this priest who admires me. I follow my heart. Is that a bad thing to do. Follow one's heart? There is a war going on inside of me. I do not lie to myself.

(*To the priest)*

Bless me Father, for I have sinned. It has been almost three months since my last confession. Since the special military operation began. Not bad, eh?

(The priest chuckles softly)

I lit candles on Christmas, made promises and now, I will light more candles on the holiest of days, Easter. I follow my heart. How bad can that be?

PRIEST

You may need a heart transplant. At least that's what I heard Rev. Burdin tell his parishioners in Nikolskoye.

PUTIN

A fine of 35,000 rubles wasn't enough for that traitor? Soon he will learn not to lurk into what he calls a forest of wolves.

PRIEST

Da, and he will learn that gay parades bring the apocalypse closer. A world run by women, nonsense, gay pride, shameful, and western over consumption, embarrassing. This is what he wants, what he preaches? You know about the hoarding going on now in America, Vladimir?

PUTIN

Preposterous. Pure madness. These people have no love. And *I* need a heart transplant?! My body is as fit as a Stradivari fiddle. I follow KIng David. I read the Bible. I may be the second coming of that great king. But please, do not call me King Putin. I am too humble for that. Call me your friend, your confidante, your father. Excuse me Father, I didn't mean to take over your title. (*He laughs)*

PRIEST

Da. Nyet. Navernoye. *(Yes, no, maybe)*

(They both laugh softly)

PUTIN

Remember, Father, you had given me your blessing, . I laid out my plans to you, confessed, you may say...(*short pause)*...You are quiet now?

(*To himself)*

Father, wash me from my inequity, cleanse me, but don't create a new heart. I don't need a heart transplant...do I?

(*To priest)*

I am perfection in health, in spirit and mind. I rose in ranks from soldier to president of the greatest country in the world. Your President. As did you rise in our church from deacon to patriarch.

PRIEST

Da. (*Yes)* There will always be a war going on in one's heart.

PUTIN

But the nerve to tell me I need a heart transplant?! Burdin is walking on thin ice. I guard my heart. I have peace, I have joy. And no, I never feel remorse. I am transformed by the renewing of my mind. So nyet, don't tell me about guilty conscience.

PRIEST

You are a clean, righteous soul bound for heaven's gate. And you will be allowed entry when that time comes.

PUTIN

That lowly priest is treading a fine line, my eminence. No one in their ignorant bravery should ever tell me how to feel, what to think, what to do. I am saving the world, not only our country-- the world! Wake up everybody!!

PRIEST

Da. (*Yes)* Say it louder. Be proud, no one else is in the Church but us.

PUTIN

(*He yells) W*ake up world! Our Mother Russia is transformed----

PRIEST

--- by the renewing of our minds and you have proven what is good and acceptable and most perfect will of God.

PUTIN

I love the Lord our God with all my mind, my soul, my heart, and strength. I follow the commandments. I love our neighbors.

PRIEST

Our God has created a clean heart in you. Not the evil ones created by Satan.

PUTIN

Look at the Nazis---they still exist! You know as well as me, many are our neighbors in the west, some closer than others. We share our countryside with pure evil. But no more!

PRIEST

Nyet! (*No)*

PUTIN

Not while I am in power.

PRIEST

You lead us in the army of salvation. Our journey to our power is now. Our soldiers are fighting for our Motherland.

PUTIN

Da! There is no greater love than giving up one's soul for one's friends. Nobody should forget the lessons of World War II. There is no place in today's world for Nazis.

PRIEST

Nyet. (*No)*

PUTIN

And please, Father, exonerate me from the white supremist mentality taking over our Orthodox churches in America. They kill each other in their own war within. I am not responsible for their actions.

PRIEST

Nyet! (*No)* Of course you aren't. They create genocide in their own country. You have nothing to do with that.

PUTIN

But many do love me in the U.S. as do our Russian citizens. Do you Father, love me?

PRIEST

Da. (*Yes)* Ya lublyu vas. (*Means 'I love you' in Russian. Say 'Yellowbluebus' quickly)*

PUTIN

They love me. Why?

PRIEST

Because you represent their desires and needs. Not an out-of-work actor in old, tattered t-shirts. You are our King.

(*To himself)* Da. Nyet. Navornoye. *(Yes, no, maybe)*

PUTIN

I am only a man with dreams who follows his heart. A mere peasant.

PRIEST

Worth 70 billion American dollars.

PUTIN

Da. Is there anything wrong with that? Let me confess it, that I have 4.17 trillion rubles? Let me know now, Patriarch Kirill.

PRIEST

(*Nervously laughs softly)*

Of course not, my President.

PUTIN

Because if there is a problem---

PRIEST

(*Suddenly stops smiling)*

---Never a problem.

PUTIN

Alright then. So I will receive the holy host tomorrow at the Easter Holy Liturgy. It is only right. Nothing will separate me from the love of God and his purpose. All things become new. A new heart leads the way to freedom, to victory. A clean slate.

PRIEST

Da. (*Yes)*

PUTIN

How many Our Fathers? Virgin Mary's? Tell me the truth. What is my contrition, Father? I have to leave. I'm meeting with my generals this evening. We have a new future, a new purpose, a newness of heart in our motherland, our Russia, Ros See Ya!

PRIEST

Long live Ros See Ya! Say three of The Lord's Prayer and semb (*7)* O Virgin Theotoke's.

PUTIN

Spaseeba. (*Thank you)*

(Lights begin to quickly fade as Putin kneels on his right knee and the priest takes his stole and covers Putin's head with it. Putin can be heard mumbling the Act of Contrition, as the Priest

mumbles the prayer of Absolution. The priest removes his stole from Putin's head. The priest picks up the crucifix and Bible from the lectern and brings them close to his leader. Putin kisses the feet of Jesus on the cross, then kisses the Bible. They both make the sign of the cross. Putin rises)

Promise to do my penance later. Da Sveedaneeya! *(Good-bye)*

The Priest nods as he puts the crucifix and Bible back on the lectern. Putin hurriedly exits the confessional area near the altar. After a short pause, the priest goes to the main altar, turns his back to the huge cross hanging in the front center, takes off his Klobuk, his hat, profusely dusts it off in the air, and then vigorously dusts his stole. He places both on the holy altar directly in front of the cross. As he falls to his knees, head down, he begins whimpering, facing the crucifix.

PRIEST

Forgive me...

Lights flicker to red, then blackout.

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