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How to write comedies when you are not allowed to laugh?

I was working on my first novel, when the riots broke out in my hometown Almaty on January 4th of this year. The riots, known as Bloody January, erupted after a jump in fuel prices in Kazakhstan. The novel was a comedy-centered story about a guy who had been running away from relationships all his life, "ghosting" his dates. The story was lively, funny, and engaging, or so I thought. I was already excited to put the last "dot" on the manuscript and experience that feeling of supreme pleasure familiar to every writer when they finish their "masterpiece."

At the same time, I was also editing a modern children's tale written by a very respected math professor. In this fairy tale, a boy named Sky and his little sister named Sun defeat the evil Robot, disarm the Witch and help many people gain their freedom.

So, on January 4th, I opened the windows to get some fresh air when the sounds of what I assumed to be fireworks burst. Unfortunately, it wasn't the firework's fog hanging in the air, but smoke caused by bombs. It wasn't the firework's fog hanging in the air, but smoke caused by bombs. Like my neighbors, I spent the next few days in a city with no local government, no internet, no bread, no banking, no working traffic lights, and no ambulances... Instead, there was the sound of gunfire, the smell of gunpowder, hourly news on the radio, and rumors - one worse than the other. Some of the rumors, unfortunately, turned out to be true.

Trying to keep my sanity and some semblance of order, I turned to my computer. After sitting in front of the screen for a while, I turned it off again. Neither my hilarious "ghosting" story nor the tale of a boy named Sky and a girl named Sun were making any headway. The problem wasn't the lack of ideas or form or structure. The problem was that these were funny, good stories. And now, after all that had happened, they seemed to me utterly irrelevant. They just didn't make any sense in this new reality around them. I live near the square in a beautiful quarter of our city. More than two hundred people died during the January riots, basically next to my house. Then, less than two months after the events in my country, one of the most terrible wars on our continent broke out in Ukraine. Could I go back to telling my funny stories? If so, to whom? And most importantly, why?

At least I now had plenty of time to think. What other internal conflicts and contradictions does a writer face besides the riots? As an editor of an online magazine, I had to turn down some authors if the editorial board found their work too "political." Even if their work was damn good! A recent contest for the best novel in my country recommended not touching on politics, especially the politics of recent years. It's easy to stigmatize a writer nowadays because of the style, language, and subject matter chosen. At meetings with other writers, they would explain how they abandoned some ideas simply because they were afraid of the reactions they might encounter. "I try not to touch on religion because it might cause resentment," one said. "Oh, I'd rather not draw any parallels, you know..." or "I'll leave the subject of the nuclear test

site for safer times" - and so on.

Even months after the January riots, nothing changed. People, it seemed to me, didn't care about stories at all anymore. Then, in May of this year, there was a theater laboratory in my city: There were seven dramas and one comedy. My comedy. I was worried "But people need to laugh sometimes, too," the director replied, making a surprised face. A little later, I got my first production offer from a state theater. Of all the plays they chose a comedy - once again, I was reminded that people sometimes need to laugh. And we published the tale of a boy of Sky and his little sister Sun in the middle of the war because people - adults and children - need to laugh sometimes.

My experience of the last months taught me that, usually, we as writers decide for ourselves what kind of writing is appropriate and what is not. And sometimes we make mistakes, as I did, forbidding myself to laugh and joke after the tragedy. Looking back, I realize that I've gotten more offers for my work in the last six months than in all the previous ones. And most of the time, people wanted my comedies. I still haven't returned to my first novel, but I know now that someday I will.