

Raya Kandova, The Actress Beyond The Kind Smiles and Beautiful Tears

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Raya Kandova in her role in The Plague by Albert Camus

And there she was, seated in the second row of the classroom as usual, coffee on the table, her sunglasses on the top of her head. Raya Kandova, 21, was crossing her legs, hands on her knees, observing everyone from her seat with her sharp look, in the purest Balkan style.

“I was never part of one of these children’s neighborhood playgroups”, was the quickest answer Mrs. Kandova could think of when she was asked about her childhood in Sofia, Bulgaria, her birthplace. “It was because of my mom, she disliked the community, and always told me she did not

want to see me near those people.” Her mom, as she does now, expected more from her than just being a housewife, walking around, pushing a stroller, and talking to the other moms at the park. “When was the first time you thought about studying the degree you’re pursuing?” Mrs Kandova answered this question using her beautiful fake American accent, which, for some reason, only Eastern European people can reproduce: “Six minutes before submitting my application to the colleague I am now studying in.” With those words, she made clear that her academic and therefore professional decisions were a consequence of an unexpected change that happened in her life.

Observing her determination, professionalism, and dedication to her career, anyone could have said that her filmic vocation was something intrinsic to her, something she might have been born with. But that vocation came later on when her initial dream was frustrated by a man who did not know how to appreciate her art.

That was exactly when she paused for a second and started to talk about what she referred to as “the failure that changed my life forever.”

“As a child, I wanted to be a lot of things: a singer, a professional chef, which my mom would have never accepted. But, I discovered that my actual talent was acting. I went to a course and I fell in love with it.”



Raya Kandova as Isabella in Measure for Measure by William Shakespeare

As it happens to any artist, her admiration of her talent became a vocation. “From the remaining three or four years of my life, I dedicated every breath and living second to theater and acting. It was everything that mattered...” Due to this fact, as a teenager, she started to prepare herself for the auditions at the National Academy for Theater and Film Arts in Sofia.

Everything was going great until: “The exam took an entire week. There were a few stages and I was rejected at the fourth one.” “I was so embarrassed and desperate because of my failure, because I considered it to be an actual failure, that I needed to run away as far as possible, and that’s why I’m here.”

As it happens with any good story, as near as it seems to be the end, the further away it is. Months later, Mrs Kandova found out the reason why she was rejected. “I was walking down the streets of Sofia and I had this weird encounter with the professor who had bumped me out of the Academy. He told me that even though I was talented, even though I was good enough, I was not what a successful female actress should be”. She did not try to hide her frustration when she reached this part of her story.



Raya Kandova in her role in The Plague by Albert Camus

While other girls prepared the role of Juliette for their monologue pieces, she chose a monologue from the play Joan D'Arc. With just a glance, any stranger could identify the features of this strong female character in Mrs. Kandova's gestures and words. "What they were looking for was not a notable self-determination nor a strong character. What they were looking for in female actresses were just kind smiles and beautiful tears."

Nobody would have ever said that one person's self-determination and strength would be a reason for being rejected. But, far from being surprised, Kandova stated: "It is what it is... It is the story of a female artist."