

My name is Maryna. I serve as an officer of the medical forces. I am 30 years old and I live in Kyiv.

I met my husband on the frontline in Donetsk in 2018. I just finished the military academy and I was leader of the medical service in his unit. He was the commander.

In the beginning, we did not get along well, because I wanted to do everything by the book and he was an experienced soldier who wanted to do things his way.

When we arrived there, my medical unit set up base one or two kilometers from the frontline, using an abandoned building as a base. And he was on the front, fighting.

Workdays were filled with medical work, meetings and paperwork. But between 01 and 03 at night, it suddenly became calm. This was our free space.

One night he invited me for a walk. I thought this was a joke, because we had discussions all the time, and I wasn't allowed to leave my base. But I accepted.

We walked on the empty road between my base and the frontline. On the first night it was kind of awkward. But it was cold and I didn't have a jacket on, so he kind of hugged me to warm me. We had more of these secret meetings. We started holding hands.

It was very romantic. One night we talked about a tv-show with dancing, which I liked. He said: Do you want to dance? Lets dance, then. And so we had our first slow dance there at night, with the shelling in the distance.

All our dates were on this strip of land between the frontline and my base, so we could run back in different directions if something serious happened. We had our walkie talkies on, listening for commands.

In the batallion nobody knew that we had this relationship. They thought we were still fighting, because we didn't even say hello to each other on work meetings.

But we married and had our daughter. I went on maternity leave while he went back to war. Everything is very transparent during a war. You don't wear any masks. So relationships evolve rapidly.

It was not difficult for me to send him back to the front, because I knew all his friends and I also knew what was going on. He told me everything. Even the things that most soldiers cannot tell their relatives.

He always texted me, even during battles. If he didn't have time to answer one of my messages, he would just send a plus. This was a sign that he was okay and would get back to me soon.

In the beginning of june 2022 his unit was sent to the Donbas region, where we met each other. I was sure all would be OK, because they knew this place very well.

One afternoon he warned me that he would not be online for some time, because his unit was doing a big operation.

In the evening I found it strange that I had not heard from him, and at nine I started texting him if he was okay. "Just send me a sign of life, a short message or a plus..."

I didn't hear from him. I started checking the online chats, and a commander had put up this message, that "The best of us is not with us any more" without mentioning anyone by name. At around 02 that night a friend of ours messaged me that my husband had died. He was killed around 7 that previous evening.

I felt like my life was ruined. When I talk about him, I always smile. Our life together was short, but it was very intense.

What that keeps me alive now is our daughter. She is a copy of him. But it's very hard to hold myself together, to hold on. I don't know. As they say: Love happens once and never.

But I am back to serving, and now I feel like I'm continuing his mission. I feel useful in the army, working for the independence of my country. It gives me a little bit of additional power to move on.

In these circumstances, you just do everything you can. You put things on your schedule, like work, childcare, hobbies, training. You are happy for your child, and you attend some concerts, you smile. But all emotions are numbed, and you feel like you are a robot. You look at yourself from the outside. As if you are not in your own body.