



The Tooth Fairy and other words of love—reflections

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Abstract

This paper shows the juxtaposition between wartime realities and trying to maintain a sense of normality for the family.

Keywords

war, children, resilience

It was a deceptively typical Wednesday... the final typical Wednesday before the war. People lived their ordinary peaceful lives. I had several working meetings during that day. Our 6-year-old daughter was at school. In the evening, I was doing something in the kitchen while my husband was telling me something that seemed important. Having dutifully done her homework, our daughter was persistently busy trying to pull one of her front teeth out, from time to time asking her dad to help her. She didn't succeed at first because it was a little early for that tooth to be pulled out, but she didn't give up as she desperately wanted the Tooth Fairy to come to her. Finally, she triumphantly did it and hurried to fall asleep so that she could find a present from the Fairy under her pillow as soon as possible. We went to bed as well, blissfully unaware yet that we would have to wake up at about 5 o'clock in the morning not because the alarm clock went off but because Ukraine was brutally attacked by Russia. I fervently hoped that I could hear not explosions but thunder, yet the news on the Internet left no hope. My beautiful, beloved country was attacked...

I woke my husband up so that we could urgently decide what to do. Our daughter was still peacefully sleeping, innocently unaware that her childhood would not be the same. So, we started to prepare to leave for the west of Ukraine, a comparatively safe area where my parents live. But having looked out of the window, we could see the endless, daunting queue of cars with people desperately trying to escape from Kyiv. We decided to stay as I didn't want to wait in that queue in the open space: it seemed dangerous. Our daughter woke up and joyfully found out that the Tooth Fairy came to her at night and left a gift. She was so happy! However, she intuitively understood that something bad had

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happened. We tried to explain to her so that she could gradually understand. At the same time, we tried not to scare her as she was only six.

We read the news again and again, but the news was more and more frighteningly pessimistic. Somehow that day, 24th February 2022, was almost over. In the evening, at about 8 o'clock, we went out to spend some time outside because it was emotionally difficult to stay inside. But in a while, we noticed an enemy aircraft flying ominously over our heads and among blocks of flats. Immediately after, the sky above a neighbouring town, Irpin, became light and red. Irpin, which is only 5 km away, was heavily attacked with a lot of explosions. We rushed back to our flat, picked our documents and some things. We decided to go to our friend Leonid, who lives in Kyiv region. Before the war, we used to visit him and his family regularly. And that time Lionchyk, as we call him, invited us to stay in his house. We came there and I realised that it was less scary to be all together. Maybe because our friend is physically and emotionally more prepared for such challenges and he always thinks many steps ahead, or maybe because in one of the rooms I noticed a rifle which was evidently prepared for use. I don't know why, but I felt more relieved and protected. Finally, we spent 10 days there. During that time, we slept with our winter clothes on. It was really uncomfortable, but we had to be ready to leave any moment. Because the enemy was terrifyingly close. Besides, there were numerous, relentless air attacks and air alarms. Every time we could hear aircraft, our children and we swiftly got into the underground cellar while my husband and Lionchyk were valiantly patrolling outside, making sure that we were safe and showing us that they were firmly controlling the situation. The children behaved well, not complaining and not asking any questions that were unbearably difficult to answer. They seemed to have become much older.

Every day I was talking to my parents, my sister, and niece on the phone, saying words of love and saying goodbye every time like the last time because we didn't know if we would see each other again. We were not sure that we would stay alive. We all cried a lot those days. We said our prayers every single hour, desperately asking God to save us, our children, and all Ukrainians. We also prayed for our soldiers, and our children painted pictures to support them. At that time, we could hear many promises that all that nightmare would be over soon. But nothing changed for the better. The attacks became so severely intense that the ground was visibly shaking. We decided to go to our parents in spite of the high risk of being murdered by Russians on our way there. Luckily, we miraculously survived and stayed alive, spending arduous 14 hours to travel 350 km. We went through numerous checkpoints on our way, and we were amazingly surprised how supportive, encouraging, and helpful the people at those checkpoints were, sharing some sweets with our daughter. She didn't eat them as she wanted to keep them as her memory about that narrow, perilous escape.

Our friend Lionchyk and his family refused to go with us to a safer place, choosing to stay at home. We were immensely grateful for their support and help. While leaving them, we didn't know if we could ever meet again. Fortunately, we indeed could. Almost one year later, we came back home to Kyiv. But unfortunately, the war is still going on, and it means that a lot of Ukrainian people are still in grave danger...