



AS IT IS

Love Grows Between Russian Man, Ukrainian Woman in Serbia

4 hours ago

Mariia Vyhivska is from Ukraine. Iurii Kurochkin is from Russia. Both are 23 years old. They fell in love while playing an online video game.

Their relationship began before Russia invaded Ukraine last February. With their nations at war, the chances of them continuing their relationship were low.

But the couple has **beaten the odds**.

Vyhivska was living near Ukraine's capital Kyiv. Kurochkin was living in St. Petersburg in Russia. Although they lived far apart, the couple did not give up.

"It wasn't hard," said Vyhivska, smiling. "I wasn't afraid, not at all. I am happy. Because I am loved."

Kurochkin described how the couple started making plans to meet in person.

"It was a year ago ... I started to organize my international passport, to visit Mariia in Ukraine," Kurochkin said. "I finished it in January, and as you know, the war started in February and it crashed all our plans."

There seemed to be little hope of them meeting in person after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Vyhivska and Kurochkin were at a loss. She moved to Czechia soon after the war started while he stayed at home in Russia. But still, they did not give up. They started considering "some **options** to live together," said Kurochkin.

They decided to go to Serbia. The Slavic nation in the Balkans has remained friendly with Russia and Russians can enter without a visa.

Serbia's capital Belgrade was where Vyhivska and Kurochkin met for the first time.

"I arrived to Serbia on 27th of April and I waited for her for several days," Kurochkin said. "She arrived from the Czech Republic and we met each other at the central bus station."

He was all that she imagined, said Vyhivska.

"There was this **moment** of unbelievable joy," she said. "I traveled for 16 hours and had no sleep, I couldn't sleep. So, I came out of the bus and I fell into his arms."

Their new life together began immediately. They first stayed in a hotel for young people before finding a small apartment just outside Belgrade. They took up different jobs while studying online at a St. Petersburg university.

Life together has not been without its problems, however. Last July, pro-Russian extremists in Serbia drew a huge Z sign — a **symbol** of Russia's invasion — on their building. Attackers broke into their home. They were also attacked by a violent mob, Kurochkin said.

"We talk about the war sometimes but we don't have any problems between each other," said Kurochkin.

For Vyhivska, the biggest concern has been how she will be seen by other Ukrainians because of her relationship. She notes that her own family has no objections to the relationship.

"What happens next? We'll see," she said. "We don't know what happens tomorrow."

Kurochkin said the couple will just take things as they come: "We are happy because we are together."

I'm Ashley Thompson.

The Associated Press reported this story. Ashley Thompson adapted it for VOA Learning English.

Words in This Story

beat the odds -- *idiom.* to succeed even when you are not like to

option - *n.* the opportunity or ability to choose something or to choose between two or more things

moment - *n.* a very short period of time

symbol - *n.* an action, object, event, etc., that expresses or represents a particular idea or quality — often + *of*
