**Mishy Harman (narration):** Hey listeners, it's Mishy. So as you know, during these incredibly difficult days, we're trying to bring you voices we're hearing among and around us. Not fleshed out stories, just quick conversations, postcards really, that try to capture slivers of life right now. Yesterday, we heard from Itai Kramer, a 50-year-old reservist who enlisted himself and is now waiting together with tens of thousands of other soldiers to enter Gaza. And today we go from the battlefield to an impromptu outdoor wedding in Jerusalem. Because yes, despite everything, life continues amid the horrors. Here's our producer Adina Karpuj with her dear friend Katherine Leff.

**Adina Karpuj:** So Kat, can you start by introducing yourself.

**Katherine Leff:** I'm Katherine. I live here in Jerusalem. And I got married this Monday in the middle of war. My partner is Avichai. And we met about over six years ago. We were both waiters at the same restaurant. And we got engaged last February. And we had been planning, you know, basically a huge Israeli wedding party with 400 guests.

**Adina Karpuj:** Wow. Taking you back to last week, what were you doing? What were you preparing for? What were you imagining?

**Katherine Leff:** I was just about like tiny things like you know, getting an ill timed zit, I was concerned about that. I was concerned that you know, what if the weather was going to be bad. I was constantly checking the weather app, you know, to see if there was going to be rain or sun. But at some point I did manage to mostly wrap everything up. And then I was just enjoying time with my family who had flown in from the States. You know, just walking around Tel Aviv; we went to the beach; we were in the Old City on Friday.

I was actually really excited to be a bride. I actually wasn't one of those little girls who had always dreamed of it, but as I got closer to it, I started to get really excited. And I kept imagining the day of: like waking up and it being really peaceful and putting on some nice music and doing some yoga, and having my friends come over. Just being pampered and having a special day and having everyone I love together in the same place.

**Adina Karpuj:** Okay, now take me to Saturday. What did that day look like for you?

**Katherine Leff:** So me and Avichai had said goodbye Friday afternoon. We didn't want to see each other a few days before the wedding. And I had this dream Saturday morning where the wedding was canceled. And it wasn't because of Avichai, because of like external circumstances. And then sirens wake me up from this dream and I immediately looked at the news. And my first concern was for my sister and brother-in-law, who had come from America with their two small kids. And I immediately called them. I was like: “Don't, be alarmed, but I think we're at war.” I started thinking about the wedding when people started messaging me. Because amidst all the craziness like I had friends who were texting me saying: “I've been thinking about you. Like, I'm so sorry, this is happening.” And at that point, I realized there's not going to be a wedding on Monday.

**Adina Karpuj:** And then what happened?

**Katherine Leff:** Avichai’s mother told me that we don't postpone joyous occasions [*Hebrew translation*] as they say. So I was trying to understand like where it comes from, like why can't we postpone. I don't want to do this. Like how can we even consider doing something so happy when everything is so dark. It didn't make any sense to me. But just everyone around me was like, we don't postpone it. And I think a part of it is…we don't know if we'll be able to do it in the future. But we know that we can do it now.

**Adina Karpuj:** At that point Avichai was set to go to reserves.

**Katherine Leff:** They had called him up already on Saturday. But he had told them that he's getting married on Monday. And he didn't want to go anywhere before he was married. You know, we had spent the longest time waiting for it. He told me: “Katherine, I would rather be married to you more days than less days. So we're getting married on Monday.

**Adina Karpuj:** The wedding hall had cancelled and everything was gonna look really different. Were you still looking forward?

**Katherine Leff:** At first I just I didn't want to enjoy it. Like I just wanted to check it off the list. I was ready to come in sweatpants and have the minimum amount of people necessary. But then at some point on like Sunday evening, I was sitting with one of my friends and she was telling me: “You deserve to have a beautiful ceremony, even if it's not what you expected.”

She basically managed to convince me that even though the conditions were not ideal, there's no reason we can't make it beautiful. She asked me: “What would make you happy tomorrow? What is something that would make you feel really good?” And I thought about it, and I told her that I would like a flower crown. So she immediately posted on Facebook saying that her best friend is getting married tomorrow and that she requested a flower crown.

**Adina Karpuj:** In fact, a whole bunch of us started posting. We wrote that we were planning a wedding outside the neighborhood’s bomb shelter, and that we needed everything: a *chuppah*, chairs, fairy lights, a *kise kallah* (a bridal chair), a makeup artist and a hairstylist. We told Katherine not to worry, that we've got this. And without her knowing, dozens of volunteers—total strangers—showed up. There was a band, photographers, an event planner, and a whole group of teenagers from the local youth movement who raked the place. Everything was ready.

**Katherine Leff:** Just as we were leaving to go to the wedding, to go to the chuppah, the siren went off. So we hopped into the shelter. And everyone's like: “Oh, there's a bride in here,” like “wow, that's so cool, mazel tov.”

There were a lot of tears that day—whether happy tears, sad tears, mixed tears. So the makeup lady instructed my friends how to fix me up every time. So suddenly we're all in the bomb shelter, and my friend is like tapping my face, fixing up my makeup in the bomb shelter. And for me that was one of the most surreal moments. We waited 10 minutes and headed out. And then…

*[music]*

The first thing that happened was what I heard before I even saw anything. And I was hearing live music, and I'm walking down for my first look with Avichai, and before I even reached him, I look to my left and I see this… they transformed this tiny park that I passed by every week into this beautiful little wedding dreamland. I was just shocked. There was not only, you know, beautiful decorations with everything set up, and a band playing, there was even the beautiful *kise kallah*, the bridal chair, which I was not expecting to have one, you know, I had given up on that idea. And then once it was there and decorated so beautifully, like I was able to give blessings to, you know, all of my friends and family. And it was for me one of the most special moments because it really it invited us in, like there was the bridal chair and suddenly my friends are like here, it's waiting for you.

**Adina Karpuj:** What did it feel like doing this when sirens are going off?

**Katherine Leff:** From Saturday morning when I woke up I had felt nothing but dread and sadness, like everyone. But the moment that I was allowed within all of this sadness to be a bride for a moment, it felt like I was protected. Like I was being shielded from everything around us. And I don't take that for granted at all, the fact that in these crazy times it felt normal.

**Adina Karpuj:** I’ll just say that I heard a lot of people saying this and it was true, I mean the whole neighborhood came, right, so many strangers. Right behind the *chuppah* there were two elderly people sitting in their lawn chairs clapping you on the entire way and rooting for you. And I think what I heard most after the party, that we impromptu had, is that maybe you feel that, you know, others helped you, but actually the wedding brought a lot of light to people in a really dark time.

**Katherine Leff:** Right, well thank you for just making it the most, you know, one of the most magical days of my life.