

Sunflower



Ukraine. Nowadays.

Nadia (Hope) had lived her whole life in a small village in eastern Ukraine and knew the world only from textbooks and the internet.

Her only “journey” was the daily bus ride to the nearby town to finish school.

Later, her parents divorced, fighting over property.

She remembered that day like it was yesterday: her father looked her in the eye and said he didn’t care, turned around and left.

Then her mom packed a bag, said she was going to work abroad — and never came back.

Nadia was left alone with her grandma Vera(Faith), who couldn’t walk anymore.

Then the War came.

Most neighbors fled right away, leaving everything behind for looters.
Soon, her grandma died from the shock.
Nadia dug the grave herself in the frozen garden soil and buried her.
Nadia didn't believe in God — because if there was a God, he would've never allowed all this to happen.
Or maybe he just turned his back on this world and vanished — like her dad did.

Nadia couldn't cry anymore.
She had no faith, no hope, no strength left.
She was alone in this world.
Her mind was worn out, everything around felt grey, like the dawn just wouldn't come...

And in that darkest hour, she had a dream:
It was a sunny day. She was walking across an endless field, watching the wind run through the grass, and swallows flying in the blue sky, shouting about something only they knew.
Far ahead, something bright was shining in the middle of red poppies and blue cornflowers.
As she came closer, she saw it wasn't the sun — it was just a sunflower 🌻.
She touched it — and felt the presence of something unexplainably warm and real. Then she woke up.

She was lying in bed. The sunflower was in her hands.
It smelled like dry, hot summer fields.
Nadia didn't believe her eyes. She thought it was just a dream inside a dream — she knew that bitter feeling when you wake up and realize it wasn't real.
She got up, went to the kitchen, and put the sunflower in a bucket of water.
It started glowing brighter and brighter, spreading sunlight and summer warmth through the cold walls.
The windows were boarded up, so no one outside could see this miracle.
She touched the sunflower's head — it felt like a warm, purring cat.
Her heart raced — it was proof that this world hadn't rotted completely in hate and madness.

After a while, her house felt like summer.
She stopped heating the stove, even though it was December and electricity was a luxury.
Then she noticed that vegetables in the pantry started sprouting and growing faster than usual.
So she decided to try an experiment — use the sunflower to incubate chicken eggs.

But, as it turned out, the sunflower had its own time —
because just two weeks later, early in the morning, Nadia woke up from a soft peeping sound: the chicks were hatching.
They looked funny and bright, like sunbeams — like they had absorbed all the summer in the world.
The sunflower glowed, radiating a peaceful calm.
"Two weeks..." Nadia thought.
"Though... why am I even surprised?" she smiled.

Later she started hatching chicks regularly.
Sometimes she felt like, if she opened the door — there'd be summer outside.
Real summer.
Where the grass whispers in the wind. Where no war drags on, the mud doesn't slurp, and pain doesn't howl.

But time passed, and the war didn't end.
Missiles and drones flew by more often, bringing death — cold, dumb, mechanical, by order...

All that time since the sunflower appeared in her life, disaster and looters passed her house by.
But one night, after waking up from a loud boom, she felt a loss — like something warm and alive left this world.
The sunflower was gone.
Just like the neighbor's house — a missile hit it.

Her own house stood with broken windows like a skull's empty sockets, and a roof torn by shrapnel.

Nadia realized the sunflower protected her, using up its last miracle.

She started heating the stove again — the house was freezing, and the chicks cried from cold, which began to bite them.

She sat near the stove, opened its door, moved the box with chicks closer, and stared at the fire. But compared to the sunflower's warmth — it only warmed shadows on the walls...

She made up her mind: sold the chicks, packed a backpack, took her secret stash — and went to Poland to forge her fate.

She didn't know what was next. But for the first time in a while — she didn't care.

In Poland, she found a job. Met a man. Fell in love.

They got married. Later she gave birth to a daughter — and named her: Lyubov (Love)

Time passed. But the War still didn't end.

And one night, she dreamed again:

She, her husband, and their daughter were walking across a huge whispering green field.

That same sunflower was glowing ahead, like a lighthouse from another world — right as, in the world where they slept, a nuclear mushroom bloomed — and their home turned into radioactive ash.

The End

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