

The Sunflower

A fairy tale in the spirit of H.C. Andersen by Henrik Frederiksen, ©ElephantTribe.org

Far out in the country, in a garden full of showy hollyhocks and fragrant lavender, lay a small, black-striped seed.

It was quite unremarkable to look at, and had one dropped it on the cobblestones, a sparrow would probably have snatched it up in a jiffy. But now it lay in the gardener's rough hand, and all at once it was pushed deep down into the dark, moist soil.

"Brr, how dark it is here!" thought the little seed and shuddered. "And such silence. You would think the world had completely stood still."

But the world certainly had not stood still. The sun's rays tickled the brown earth, and spring wept fine, mild tears of rain down over the flowerbed. Down in the darkness, the seed began to feel a strange tingling. It stretched, and suddenly its little striped coat burst. A slender, pale-green arm groped upward toward the warmth.

One early morning, the sprout broke through the crust of the earth. "Ah, the light!" it rejoiced. "This is where the world truly comes alive!"

The little sprout looked up at the great, dazzling sun in the sky. "I want to be like you," it thought, and began to grow. And it grew with a haste that astonished the whole garden. Before long, it had overtaken both the gooseberry bush and the roses by the fence. It grew large, bristly leaves that resembled green elephant ears, and a stalk as thick and strong as a little tree trunk.

When midsummer arrived, the miracle happened. At the top of its long stalk, it unfolded a mighty crown. It was brilliantly yellow with a dark, velvety-brown heart in the

middle. It had become a sunflower. Every single day, from morning till evening, it turned its large, golden face toward the star of the sky.

"Look at me!" said the Sunflower proudly to the other flowers. "The roses bear thorns, and the lilies wither at the slightest puff of wind, but I am the sun's own child on earth! See how I catch the light."

The roses fell silent, a bit offended, and the grass whispered that pride often comes before a fall. But the Sunflower merely swayed haughtily in the summer breeze. It was the undisputed king of the garden.

But alas, nothing in this world lasts forever. Summer drew to a close. The days grew shorter, and the wind began to bite. The great, yellow crown lost its radiant petals; they fell to the ground, brown and wrinkled. The Sunflower's large, velvety-brown heart had now swollen and filled with hundreds of new, heavy seeds. Its head became so infinitely heavy that the strong stalk had to bend. Slowly,

but unfailingly, it bowed its face down toward the dark earth from which it had once sprouted.

"Is this the end?" sighed the Sunflower gloomily. "My beauty is gone. Now I can no longer see my beloved sun, only stare down into the cold soil. What a sad fate for a king."

Autumn turned into winter, and the first white snow fell over the garden. The Sunflower stood withered and bowed, black and frozen.

But one cold morning, a flock of freezing little birds came flying. They were titmice and sparrows that had not found food for many days. They settled on the Sunflower's bowed neck, and with small, eager beaks they pecked the nutritious, black-striped seeds out of its dry heart.

"Thank you, you good flower," chirped a little titmouse.

"You are saving our lives in this harsh wintertime."

Then the Sunflower felt a warmth spread all the way down into its dry stalk, a warmth that almost felt stronger than the summer sun itself. It understood now that its beauty and upright pride had only been a brief joy, but that its heavy, bowed head was passing life itself onward. Its hundreds of little seeds would feed the small birds, and some of them would fall into the earth and become new children of the sun next summer.

And that, thought the old Sunflower in the midst of the snow, was in truth the most beautiful fairytale of them all.