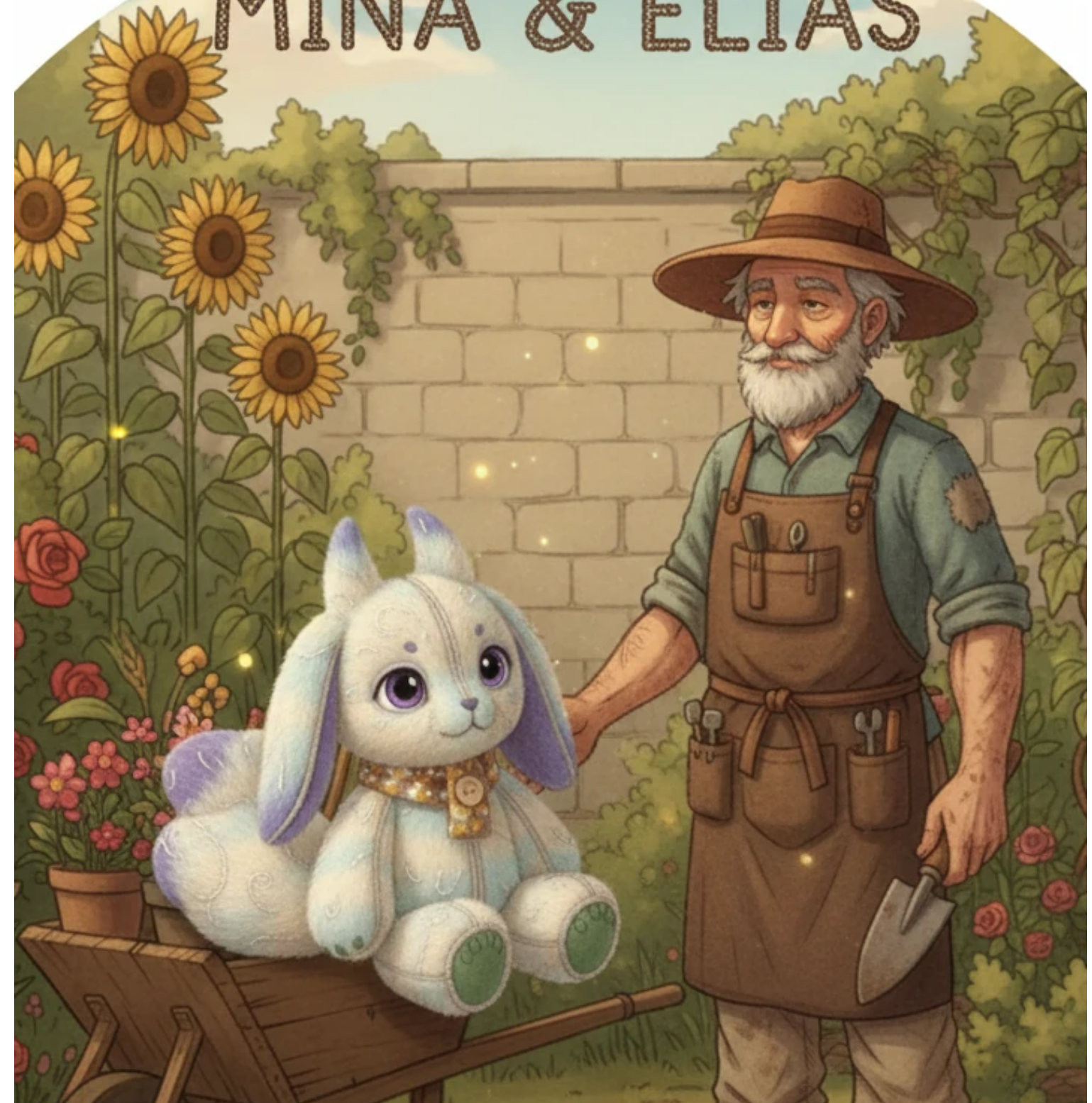


MINA & ELIAS



The Girl Who Chased the Spring

Anfel MAHIOUT



Mina stood by the frosted window, her heart longing for the hum of spring while the world outside was wrapped in a silent, snowy blanket. She spent her days counting the hours until the first crocus would pierce the cold ground, dreaming of velvet butterfly wings. To her, the vibrant green of a new leaf was far more precious than the warmth of winter's hot cocoa.



This year, winter was stubborn and refused to leave, clinging to the windowpanes like intricate lace. The garden remained a frozen, silent expanse of hard stone and empty flower beds that made Mina's heart feel heavy. If the sun won't wake up on its own, she whispered to the frost, then I will have to wake it myself.



Mina marched into the garden and knelt by the soil, where tiny, tightly closed buds were shivering in the bitter cold. Thinking she could help, she used her trembling fingers to gently force a bud open so it could see the light. Instead of a vibrant flower, the delicate petals turned brown and limp, unable to withstand the premature touch of the winter air.



Next, Mina decided the earth was simply too thirsty to wake up, so she lugged her heavy watering can across the yard. She poured water until the soil became a thick, sticky mud, then stood tall to lecture the stubborn clouds. Her voice grew hoarse as she commanded the sun to shine brighter, but the sky remained gray and indifferent to her demands.



By the next morning, the garden looked like a tired, tangled mess of withered buds and drowning bulbs. Mina sat on the back step with her knees tucked to her chest, feeling the prickle of tears against her cheeks. She had tried so hard to bring beauty to the world, but she realized with a heavy heart that she had only caused harm.



A pair of worn, muddy boots appeared as Elias, the wise old gardener from down the lane, knelt quietly beside her. He didn't offer a scolding, but instead began to gently rake away the soggy debris she had left behind. Nature is a shy guest, he said softly, explaining that one cannot drag her to the table before she is ready.

ELIAS & MINA



A Gardener's Memory

Mina looked at her soil-stained hands as Elias placed a small, dry seed into her palm. He told her that the real magic isn't found in the bloom itself, but in the quiet, faithful act of waiting. He explained that if you rush the flower, you lose the miracle of its opening and the trust that life knows its own way.



Mina took a deep breath and decided to stop pulling, pouring, and shouting at the sky. She began to simply watch, noticing how the light changed by a fraction of a degree and grew warmer each passing day. She learned to care for the garden by clearing the paths and keeping her heart still, observing the birds as they returned one by one.



Then, it happened not with a rush, but with a gentle whisper from the earth. A single, perfect tulip pushed through the dark soil, followed quickly by a patch of shy violets and a cloud of painted butterflies. The garden did not just wake up; it exploded into a symphony of color that took Mina's breath away.



Mina stood in the center of the bloom, realizing this was not a garden she had forced, but a masterpiece she had allowed to become. The air was thick with the scent of spring and the flutter of wings she had missed so dearly. She finally understood that by learning to wait, she had found a magic far greater than she ever could have chased.