

# *The tallest Flower*

*Reg Down*  
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There was a lady, tall and slim and exceedingly shy. She was shy of her slimness, she was shy of her tallness and her head hung down to hide her height. This lady loved the sun. To her the sun was more lovely than the moon or any creature of the world. It was more precious than gold. She loved the sun so much that when she smiled the sun itself shone out of her face.

The lady was a gardener. She wasn't shy around plants and the plants were not shy of her. They grew under her care. They grew round or fat or deep or wide or long, each according to how they should be. But none grew so tall as that lady. Wherever she was in the garden you saw her easily. Even the fruit trees were smaller when she stood beside them.

One day the lady left. They found her lying in the garden, her face to the sun. That's where they buried her. They buried her in her garden before the snows covered the ground five feet deep.

In the spring a seedling sprang lively from her grave.

"It's a squash," said some.

"It's a melon," said others.

The seedling grew further. It grew straight and true and put out large leaves.

"It's a tomato," said some.

"No, it's an aster," said the others.

The seedling kept growing, and growing, and all voices were silenced. Everyone watched as the plant grew tall and slim. Soon it was taller than all the other plants. It towered over them.

When the sun rose on midsummer day the plant set a single flower bud. The bud was large and hidden, covered over with green leaves.

"What's inside?" everyone asked. "What flower hides in there?"

No one knew.

The summer sun grew stronger, the days grew warmer and the flower bud grew larger, bigger than any seen before. Finally, one glorious day, when the sky brightened in the east, the flower opened and gazed at the rising sun. It had golden yellow petals shining like rays all about its round face.

“A sunflower!” the people cried in amazement.

They watched as the flower followed the sun into the heights. It tracked the sun all day, slowly turning its head until, in the evening, the sun set in the red west. In the night, while the people slept, the flower moved its head and was ready to greet the day when the new sun rose in the golden east.

The bees came and tended the sunflower. They buzzed and sang as the seeds swelled and ripened. Then the huge flower slowly, shyly, sank its head from the weight of the seeds. People came from distant places to gather the seeds. The next year, in gardens all about, tall sunflowers gazed at the sun until, full of seeds, they hung their heads down shyly.