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Azerbaijan

Room 12a – Without dark nights (Aysel)

// **In the Silence After the Anthem**
It is quiet here. Not the quiet of an ending, but the kind that arises when something has not yet decided whether it wants to become. The room exists, but it does not know itself. It breathes. Not steadily. But perceptibly. Sometimes, a shadow appears, but it belongs to no body. Sometimes, a word is heard, but it has no speaker yet. Maybe someone was just here. Maybe someone is about to come. Maybe it's you. Maybe it's me. A soft breeze moves the curtain. Outside, there is no weather, no land, only the sense that something is possible. There is a place in the room where a footprint appears, not solid, not lasting – just a breath in the dust. The dust remembers. Not names, but weight. And direction. This room is open. But not empty. It is ready. But not in a hurry. It does not ask. But it listens. If you stay here, you do not stand still. You linger, so that something may pass through you.
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Room 12b – Without dark nights (Zəhra)

// **the House by the Railway**
In a small house near Gəncə, close to the railway tracks, lives a woman named Zəhra. Her name means “blossom,” but her voice has become quiet over the years. She was a teenager when the Soviet Union fell apart. The morning after independence, she remembers, it was too quiet outside. As if the world was holding its breath. Her father had fought in Karabakh. Her uncle was sent to Siberia. The family stopped talking about politics. Too dangerous, too hopeless, too late. They kept their hands busy and their mouths shut. The electricity worked sometimes. The radio played foreign music. She learned to hear between the lines. Now Zəhra is 47. She teaches literature at a school nearby. She still remembers the poem by Hüseyn Cavid:

“Qaranlıq gecələr olmasaydı, Sözləri oxşayan ulduzlar bunca sevilməzdı.”
(“If there were no dark night, the stars that gladden the eyes would be less beloved.”)

She sometimes reads this to her students. And they ask: “Who was he?” And she says: “One who believed that a country must be dreamed into being – not only declared.” Sometimes she walks to the edge of the tracks. Trains rarely pass. She listens to the silence after the wind. And once, she said, she felt she could name the day when everything stopped feeling like a future. She didn’t say what day it was.
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