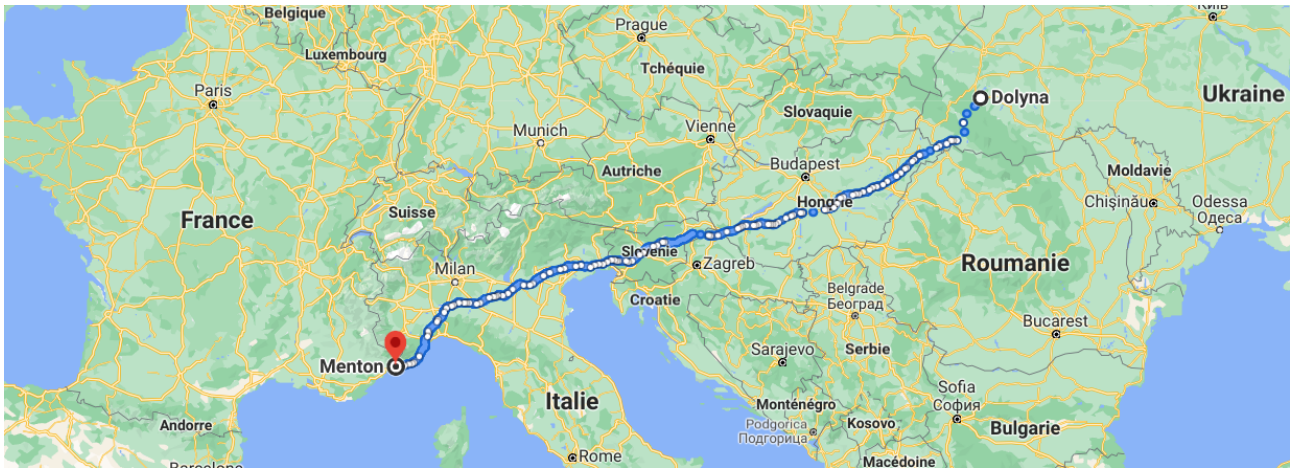


Love in a Time of War

By Elyne-Lin



I first heard that story when I was a little kid, from my mom, who heard it from the great-grandmother of a friend of hers. At the time I thought it was just romantic and I didn't really see all of the struggles caused by war. But now I do, and I think it's important to tell that story:

It all started with a Russian girl named Audrey who had been abandoned by her parents in Ukraine. There she met a French man by the name of Jacques and fell in love with him. Unfortunately, the Second World war broke out and Jacques had to go home to his family and fight for his country. However, before doing so, he gave her his address in France, so that when she could, she would find him.

A few weeks after Jacques left, Audrey gave birth to a boy whom she named Vincent. Years later, when the war was almost at an end, she decided to finally join her loved one in France, with her six-year old son Vincent. It was dangerous to take the plane, and besides, she didn't even have the money for it, and she didn't have a car either. So with Vincent in her arms, Audrey took a train to the border of Ukraine.

And after that came the hard part - she had to walk and try to hitchhike her way across all of the countries between Ukraine and Menton, France (where Jacques lived). Those countries were: Hungary, Slovenia and Italy. It was an exhausting journey, made even harder by the fact that she had to do everything all by herself and besides that, she had very little money.

When she got about halfway she was afraid she wouldn't make it - she had spent the night on the street in Slovenia because she had already spent most of her money on food and on having somewhere to sleep these few months, but a group of women saw her and her puffy eyes there, and asked Audrey if she needed somewhere to stay for a few days. She felt so relieved to finally be able to stay somewhere for more than 1 or 2 days. They took her to this little house with several mattresses on the floor where 4 children were jumping. One of the women, who was short and had big blue eyes, spoke to her in a kind, soothing voice: "Well, it's not much but you can stay 5 days here," she said. Audrey nodded gratefully but she was curious why these women were helping her.

“Why are you doing all this for me ?” she murmured. The women all looked at one another and then at Audrey. They all wore the same sad smiling expressions. An olive-skinned woman finally spoke.

“ We've all been through this dearie.” That was the only answer she got.

Seven weeks later, Audrey was walking along a street in Italy. Vincent had grown quite a bit these past weeks, but he was tired now and wanted to go home. Looking at him, she suddenly realised that they had been travelling for quite a while. Fortunately they were now only a few weeks from Menton. Audrey didn't eat much because when they found food she always let Vincent eat first; she was often thirsty because of walking under the merciless sun and on roads destroyed by bombs. Audrey always knew that this trip was going to be hard but she was so exhausted. Her feet and her back were damaged by almost 6 months of walking and of taking care of her son.

1 month later, she finally arrived in Menton. She asked around and found her lover's house. He was waiting for her, all this time. And after all these months of walking, she had finally reached a place she could call 'home'.

Audrey lived until she was 96 years old and had 10 children.