

SONA ABGARYAN

EVA

PREFACE

One day

Eva opens her eye. The first thing she sees is the black roach on the ceiling, making a few quick, small turns and disappearing into the crevices of the wooden planks. Eva's heart is pounding with a stabbing pain, and there seems to be no pulse.

"My girl, you are finally conscious," a familiar voice is heard. The stabbing pain disappears, and the heartbeat returns.

She turns her head with difficulty and sees Grandma's face, almost white, with big eyes, a long nose, and thin lips.

"Grandma," Eva barely utters.

"Drink this!" Grandma hands her a green liquid with a pungent smell.

Eva takes a sip and spits it out.

"What is this?"

"It's the soul of thyme; drink it. You need to focus on building up your strength."

Grandma runs her hand through Eva's long, tousled black hair.

"I don't remember anything. What happened?"

"Your memories will return to you bit by bit. It just takes time." Sitting next to Eva, Grandma struggles to hold back tears as she gazes at the girl's disfigured face. She has to leave. Now is not the time for Eva to see her Grandma's tears.

"You can rest now. I'll gather the necessary plants for your medicine and return soon."

Grandma shuts the door as she leaves the room.

As she touches her face, Eva's hand reaches her wounded eye—it feels swollen and damp to the touch. Her face is throbbing with pain, and when she touches her mouth she discovers some of her teeth are broken. She wonders what happened. She attempts to move her legs, but they feel nonexistent. Her mind races with questions, *Was I assaulted? Did I fall from some great height? Was I in a fire?*

She places her hand on her head. Her hair! It's gone! Instead, there are scars of varying sizes. Eva's pupil dilates as her emotions peak and her heart races. But on the right side of her head, long strands of hair drape over her shoulder and onto the pillow. A long exhale escapes from

Eva's lips. It's okay: there's hair on one side. Eva's fingers seek out the wounds on her head again, tracing over the hardened and numb surface in some areas. Grandma must have smeared ointment over them. Eva's mind wanders as she feels the sticky substance on her wounds, musing that it might be rosehip soul, and she smiles lopsidedly. Pain has obliterated her memory, leaving only the familiar scent of the room, the wooden ceiling, and the blue light trickling in from outside and falling onto the bed rails. Eva decides to sleep.

Eva's eyelid flutters open after a minute. A single-wire radio hums across the room.

"Grandma?"

There is someone in the room, or...

Eva's body is wracked with pain as she tries to sit up. She feels like her ribs are fused to her flesh and won't budge. Eva shifts her hand to the side, making tentative movements as she searches for a weapon or anything that could be useful. Maybe it's a beast, a wolf, or a bear. Despite the pain, Eva strains to open her eye as much as possible and gazes toward the door. A tall, obscure figure looms in the corner, its face and eyes concealed by shadows and what seems to be an umbrella hovering over its head.

"Who are you?", she whispers.

A chill wind rushes in through the door, causing the rustling sound to grow louder. The sound of heavy rain intensifies and engulfs Eva's senses. Suddenly, all sounds fade away for a few seconds, and Eva is left in silence. All that remains are a few drops of water falling from the ceiling and landing on her face. Her nose starts bleeding. She wipes her nose, smearing a streak of blood across her cheek.

Moments later, Grandma walks in, swishing with invisible plants stuffed in her skirt. The skirt bulges, but Eva knows she won't see any plants there.

Grandma has a unique talent for finding and identifying plants that are visible only to her. She gives them names, draws their intricate structures, and writes about them in beautifully handwritten books. She seizes every opportunity to tell fascinating stories about these unseen plants.

According to Grandma, the soul of thyme is constantly laughing, and healing flowers fall from it. If thyme stops laughing, it dies instantly and becomes more potent in healing. Finding dying thyme is quite challenging. The thyme plants are usually either in constant laughter or long dead, having lost their healing powers.

"Did you give me a poisonous mushroom, Grandma? I'm seeing things."

"What did you see?" Grandma asks in surprise.

"A man who had an umbrella—"

"Umbrella?" Grandma interrupts. "Was there wind? Did you hear static?"

Grandma lets go of her skirt and starts running erratically around the house: she looks under the tables and opens the cupboards; she mutters under her breath, searching for something.

She turns the whole house upside down, searching. Eva hears her mumbling: "What a disaster!" and "Oh no, no, no."

"Grandma! What happened? Why are you so unsettled?"

"Eva! It's the Umbrella. He comes... he comes when he leaves an umbrella in the house."

Then, out of breath, Grandma approaches Eva's bed and throws the blanket aside.

"Are you okay? It seems like nothing has happened."

"You mean besides my wounds?"

"If Umbrella Man comes, he must kill or leave his umbrella, which means he just postpones the kill."

"Why would he kill? For what?"

"I dunno, I dunno ...", - says Grandma, her eyes wide.

She carefully covers Eva with a blanket, wipes the blood off her cheek with a handkerchief, checks every corner of the house once more, then sits on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

"The Umbrella Man leaves metal umbrellas in the victim's body, which slowly open and cause unbearable pain until they die." Grandma explains, her voice icy.

"But what does it mean if he doesn't kill or leave an umbrella?"

"I don't know. I don't know what it means."

Grandma wonders whose side the Umbrella Man is on. The Gerbers? Unlikely! He acts alone. He has other plans if he doesn't take or leave anything.

Eva shuts her eye and drifts into sleep while Grandma runs her fingers through her partly missing black hair.

"Oh, Eva...", - Grandma sighs, black tears trickling from her big, almost white eyes.

Sunrise

Eva wakes up in complete darkness. What's the matter? What happened? The same questions keep spinning in her head, and her heart is crushed by the inability to find the answer. Water stains dot the ceiling. The roof needs to be repaired. But there is no rain outside, and Eva remembers the Umbrella Man. Perhaps he has returned to kill her.

"If my hair were still in place, I'd end him," she thinks, smiling crookedly.

A few drops of water drip from the ceiling and fall onto her swollen forehead. Her face grimaces in pain. The droplets are big and cold. Purple tears roll out from Eva's eyes. Her

heart is in stabbing pain; it's hard to breath. It's not like she wants to cry, but the tears are flowing on their own. It seems like some invisible force is pulling the tears out of her.

Suddenly the purple tears break away from her eyelashes and are drawn toward the ceiling. The tears flow upwards and are absorbed into the ceiling, leaving dark traces, then disappearing.

Eva still hopes that she is hallucinating from Grandma's invisible plants., A few minutes later, completely exhausted, she drifts into a deep sleep.

In the morning, Grandma enters the room and opens the windows.

"Eva! How did you sleep?"

"Amazingly"

"Did you see anything strange?"

"The ceiling was leaking, the roof needs to be fixed, Grandma."

Grandma approaches Eva, "Then what?"

"What do you mean – then what?"

"What happened after the ceiling leaked?"

Grandma rubs her hands restlessly as if she were crushing a nettle.

"Then my tears flew up into the ceiling; I guess they went to repair it. What plants are you going to test on me today?"

Grandma sits on Eva's bed taking hold of her bandaged hand.

"Eva. Soon, you will remember everything."

"Don't you want to tell me what happened, Grandma?"

"No, I can't. If I tell you, you won't understand a single thing, and you will be more confused. You must remember it yourself. All I can say is that the Umbrella Man has taken your tears, which means he will return them to you."

Grandma grows silent, momentarily distracted by a bee's buzzing, then continues.

"He will return your tears a hundredfold, and then you will remember everything."

"Grandma, I'm afraid. Afraid I'll find out something that will make me go crazy. Tell me, is that so?"

Grandma smiles, "No, my Eva. You are already crazy. Drink this infusion; it will give you strength."

"What is this? I don't see anything."

“This is a fighting nettle; it will help you at the right time.”

“Of course, it will.”

Eva opens her mouth and feels tickles on her tongue and throat. She looks at Grandma and smiles. She missed her restless expressions and erratic movements.

“Eva! I have to go to the city; there are things to do,” says Grandma, hiding her gaze. She gets up and shakes off her apron. “All the necessary things are placed next to you. I will be here first thing in the morning. What can I bring you from the city?”

“You’re leaving me alone? Who is going to pick up this mess? You’ve turned the whole house upside down...look, you haven’t even picked up the invisible plants you left by the door.”

Grandma looks at the door confused; for a second, she thinks that Eva has started to see the plants, but then she understands: Eva doesn’t want to be left alone. Grandma understands but can’t do anything. She leaves the house, locks the door with a key, turns around, and leans against the door, holding back tears.

Noticing that Grandma is still behind the door, Eva shouts with a wheezing voice, “Bring me Coca-Cola. Go! Everything will be fine.”

Now Grandma is crying. She puts her hand over her mouth and goes towards the garage.

Eva sees white baby goat figurines on the dresser. It seems like the only thing Grandma didn’t touch in the house—everything else in the room is turned upside down. The figurines are so familiar. They take Eva back to her childhood. But she cannot remember anything.