

The Last Craving for the Blueberry Pancakes

By Kristina Abovyan

“Why do you think we’re here?”

A hoarse voice brought Ellen back to the gloomy reality. She was replaying the conversation she had with her father that morning over and over in her head, thinking of clever comebacks. Ellen could never confront her father and be honest with him; anytime they would argue, she would fall silent and lock her feelings up, belittling them. So, when the stranger from the neighboring table spoke to her, she was absorbed by the heated argument in her head.

“Excuse me?” Ellen said, taking a closer look at the middle-aged bald man with a green hoodie.

“What do you think we’re doing here?” repeated the stranger, casually sipping his coffee.

“I’m just craving my favorite blueberry pancakes,” she chuckled, quickly turning red.

The stranger didn’t pull a muscle.

“No, I don’t mean why we’re in the ‘Cafe on the Edge’ alone. But in general, why are we here, leaving this life?”

Ellen looked around the almost-empty cafe, confused. She had strangers talk to her in cafes, mostly hitting on her. But this was her first what’s-the-purpose-of-life kind of situation. Maybe, there’s something in his coffee, she thought and decided to play along.

“I haven’t thought about it much,” she said.

“I think about it every day,” replied the man, staring out of the window.

She waited for an explanation, but there was none.

The waitress approached her table with a plate full of hot pancakes in her hand. Ellen took the first bite, and everything else became blurry. The “Cafe on the Edge” was her happy place.

When she was four, her family lived in a tiny apartment in the suburbs of Yerevan. The cafe was right around the corner, so her mother often brought her there. Whenever her dad started uncontrollably yelling at everyone, her mom would grab Ellen’s tiny freckled hand and run to the cafe. “He had a difficult childhood,” she would explain, excusing his behavior. But Ellen didn’t care; she was too young to understand, and all she had on her mind was the craving for those pancakes—her comfort food. Later, after her mother’s death, she faced her dad’s anger

issues and emotional unavailability alone. And soon, it was the new normal. As long as the yelling wasn't directed at her, she was fine. And whenever it was, she would keep her mouth shut and wait for the calm after the storm. With time, her thoughts piled up on top of each other in her head, saying them aloud was too scary.

"I don't think there's a reason we're here," Ellen suddenly turned to the man.

The stranger was silent, engrossed in his thoughts.

"Do you think there is?" she asked impatiently.

"There must be," he said, with no explanation again. The moment passed, and the man didn't seem to want to talk anymore, so Ellen didn't push for it. She never did.

When she finished her pancakes and was about to leave, she looked at the stranger one last time, wondering what was going on in his head.

"Yes, I think there is a reason we're here," he muttered, catching her gaze. "I think we're here to love and be loved, enjoy the fresh sprouts, and celebrate the first snow. We're here for late-night conversations around the kitchen table and forest hikes in the dewy mornings. We're here to have our hearts broken, meet new friends and find new lovers, search for peace, and lull violence to sleep. We're here to be afraid of the heights and embrace the discomfort of novelty, to argue, make up and seek the truth." The stranger looked up at Ellen with his nut-brown eyes and leaned forward in his chair. "I think we're here to simply live, experience the whole spectrum of life, without being afraid, discover ourselves, explore others, and be honest." Without waiting for a response, he quickly looked away and stared at the empty intersection out of the window.

Ellen slowly turned around and left the cafe. She walked for a couple of blocks with a silly smile, coming back to the things the man brought up. She took out her phone and dialed a number with slightly shaky hands. After a few beeps, a low voice greeted her on the other end of the line.

"Hey, Dad," Ellen said, taking a deep breath. "I'm ready to talk."