

EVE

Pencil. Eraser. Ruler. Paper. Gum. I played blind man's bluff with the things I wanted. I was a child, but not entirely. I was twelve years old. I shut my eyes and held out my hand. My fingers closed on air. I shivered in my thin clothes. I thought everything was within reach. I made moonlight shine in the boys' eyes. I believed I had powers.

Pencil. Eraser. Ruler. I held out my hand because, in my bag, there was nothing. I went to school completely and totally empty. I felt some kind of pride in not having anything. People can be rich even in having nothing.

Because I was small, because I was thin, because my arms and my legs were as straight as a child's drawing, the bigger boys protected me. They gave me what I wanted. They thought a gust of wind would tip me over like a paper boat with a leak in its side.

I was a paper boat. Water seeped into my sides, my stomach, my legs, my arms. I didn't know it. I thought I was strong. I weighed up my chances. Assessed every moment. I knew how to ask without seeming to.

Pencil, eraser, ruler, it didn't matter. The boys gave me things. Their faces softened slightly, and that changed everything, it made them look human. And then, one day, when I asked without seeming to, they asked me for something in return.

I thought it would be simple, it would be easy. What could they want in return? I was the smallest one, the least important one. Everyone knew I had nothing. For once, they were saying I had something. My bag held many nothings: the nothingness of my apartment, smaller and more bare than everyone else's; the empty nothingnesses of our wardrobes; even those of our trash cans. There was the nothing of my father's eye, which alcohol had turned oily. The nothing that was my mother's mouth and eyelids, both of them stapled shut. I had nothing, nothing at all to give.

But I was mistaken.

He wanted a piece of me.

Excerpt from **Eve out of Her Ruins** by Ananda DEVI
translated from the French by Jeffrey Zuckerman

Young Adult edition published by Les Fugitives editions
on 14 May 2021