

# The bloom after the storm - Chapter 14 Chapter 13

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A group huddled around the information board by the main office. A few were already debating. Some were smiling in excitement, while others were frowning in anxiety. "What is going on?" Aurora asked Maya, joining the crowd. "The scholarship program." Aurora jostled the crowd to be the first to see. Her heart sank when she noticed. The notice board was full of news that the university had opened a national competition for scholarships. The winners will receive financial assistance, and in exchange, they have to study at one of the most prestigious universities in the country. Aurora read the news two, then three times until she fully understood the details of the competition. This was just the opportunity she had been waiting for! "You're definitely applying," Noah said behind her. "I'm sure of it." Aurora looked back at Noah and her face broke into a smile. "I'm not so sure," she replied. "I wouldn't be too confident about that." "Don't make it sound like it's going to be easy," she teased, though Noah's confidence had already started to lift her spirits. "It's not," Noah explained. "But you won't apply and then you'll be kicking yourself for not doing so." "True," Aurora replied. She had no counter-argument for that. The rest of the day dragged on painfully. Each lesson was too long, and she wished the minutes away, as she could think of nothing other than the scholarship, the opportunity it brought, and the chance to be one step closer to the future she wanted. That evening, a group of students attended an info-session in order to learn more about the scholarship. The coordinator explained in detail about the requirements, the essays, the interview, and the competition from students across the nation. It all sounded daunting at first, but for the first time, Aurora felt inspired to apply. When the session finished, she walked to the gate with Noah. "You should apply, too," Aurora advised. "I'm not sure about that," Noah answered, shaking his head. "What, why?" Noah shrugged. "There are plenty of students who are better for it." "Did you just say that, seriously?" asked an annoyed Aurora. There was a slight smile on Noah's face. "Perhaps." Aurora crossed her arms. "You are one of the best students in the school." "It could be argued." "No, it couldn't." "Nope." She pointed at his chest. "There's a big 'nope' on this." Noah looked at Aurora and then chuckled. He had meant it to sound casual, but Aurora noticed that his laugh was genuine. Aurora's smile grew in response. This moment of happiness didn't last though. As soon as she arrived home, her mother saw the application form. "What is this?" she questioned, pointing at Aurora's hand. "A university scholarship." The atmosphere in the room immediately became more solemn. Ethan, who had noticed, looked at Aurora's father. "A university scholarship?" he asked. "Is that why she wants to move away?" asked her father, putting down the newspaper he was

reading. Aurora nodded. "Yes," she answered. She heard silence fill the room. The same one she feared so much. "Really do you need to apply?" Aurora blinked and looked down at her mother. "Do what?" Her mother crossed her arms. "There are more local universities to go to." The pressure in her chest increased. Of course, there wasn't a scholarship for a local university, or the application form wouldn't exist. It was an opportunity. Aurora took a deep breath and tried to be logical. "I can still apply," she explained. Her father let out a long, weary sigh. "Applying could lead to acceptance." She didn't answer. The discussion ended there, but the message was clear: "You are not going to apply." That night, Aurora sat in her room, thinking about it all. Then she understood it. For the first time, she realized that she wasn't just doing this for Noah. It was about her. Noah wasn't the reason she needed to leave. Her parents just wanted to control her life, and didn't want her to do something she wanted to. That night, Ethan knocked on her door with two bottles of soda. "To make peace," he explained. Aurora smiled. "Again?" he added, handing her one of the drinks. "You look like you could use it." "Thanks." They sat in silence for a moment. Then Ethan spoke. "Just do it," he advised. Aurora looked at him and raised an eyebrow. "Just what?" he replied. "You talked about this so many times," Ethan said with a shrug. "You should do something for yourself." She nodded and took a sip of her drink. "Mum and Dad don't want you to." "I know," Ethan said, with a soft smile. "But do this for yourself." After Ethan left, she thought some more for a while. The application form was on her desk, and she thought about that. Aurora sat and opened her notebook. Then she picked up her pen and drew a blank page. Then she wrote: I'm not letting fear win, again. She read those words and underlined them twice. Outside, the window of her bedroom swayed in the wind. Inside Aurora, was the beginning of something new. The beginning of a plan. Something more than just a dream was forming in her head, and somewhere else, Noah was filling out a similar application form. She didn't know it at this point, but both of them were about to take the first step toward the biggest turning point in their lives.