

# The bloom after the storm - Chapter 16 Chapter 15

Čoldhēart5-6 minutes

---

The list for the scholarship interview came out on a Friday morning. Before the students had even reached the school grounds, the announcement board was already crowded. Aurora managed to push through. She stared at the page, her heart hammering in her chest. First time. Second time. Then, Yes. Aurora Hayes. She took a brief pause. She was in. "You made it." Aurora turned and Noah was right behind her. A smile broke across her face. "Guess you did." Noah's name was just a few lines below hers. It was the first time they were both really happy. It meant months of hard work were finally paying off. The day moved on from there in a haze. There were congratulatory handshakes. There was advice for her interviews. Even Maya kept coming up to her about it. "Wow. That's huge, Aurora." Aurora laughed. "Like I won already." "You might." The thought made her anxious. Winning the interview meant possibility. And it meant change. The kind her parents hated. Aurora brought up the news at dinner that evening. "I made the interview stage for the scholarship," she said. A quiet followed. Her dad looked up at her. Her mom almost dropped the fork she'd just lifted. "Well, congratulations, then," he replied. He said it like he had practiced the sentence, like it had been on his mind all night, like it was a formality. Aurora felt a slight chill. Her mom cleared her throat. "Which university will the interview be held at?" she asked. Aurora didn't know how long it would take to come up with an answer. "The university hosting it is in another city," she said. Immediately her mom's face hardened. The two of them exchanged a look. It was that look again. The one she hated. She went to her room in the evening, ready to study. A knock came at the door. It was Ethan. He came over with his notebook, his eyes wide. "You look anxious," he said, taking a seat next to her. "I am anxious." "You're going to do fine." "How do you know?" Aurora laughed. "Because you always do." Ethan could be the most convincing optimist ever. Sometimes she felt like Ethan believed in her more than she believed in herself. The next week, Aurora was too preoccupied with preparing for the interview. Questions. Answers. Reading. Study guides. Everything she did was spent in preparation. Noah had been too busy doing that himself, too. They'd often end up studying together after class, with both of them trying to give each other pointers. "What are you scared of?" he asked her one day. Aurora's brow furrowed. "You mean, during the interview?" "Uh-huh." She gave it a moment's thought. "Failure." "Sounds normal to me." "What about you?" Noah looked over at her for a moment. "I get the scholarship but I still won't be able to afford the tuition," he said. It hurt her heart to know Noah had such a financial concern. He was so smart. And he never made excuses like that. "Listen, you know what?" she said. "Uh-uh." "I

think you're going to do great, too." A tiny grin came across his face. "Thanks, dude." There was no point in arguing with his self-assuredness. It didn't matter. It still helped. In the days leading up to the interview, Aurora could feel her parents getting closer and closer to an edge. They were getting more and more reserved and tense. Everything was a discussion, about Noah or the scholarship or her life plans. That's when she realized that there was no way around it. On the second to the last day before she was to go in, her dad asked her to come over to his study. Aurora's stomach clenched instantly. This was not what she had been expecting. They were never alone together. They would always sit down with her to chat over the phone or to go for dinner together. But not in their study. He motioned for her to take a seat. She did, as usual. For a moment, all he did was stare at her. She waited. Finally, he spoke. "Aurora," he began. "Yes?" "If you don't get this scholarship..." He paused. "...You will go to school nearby." Aurora stopped breathing. It wasn't a question. It was a decision. That was made, and she wasn't part of it. Her throat felt like it was closing up. She couldn't breathe. "And if I do get it?" Her dad didn't say anything immediately, but she didn't need him to. It was that long, long pause that told her everything. It was that one long moment when she realized something frightening. The battle hadn't yet started. It was ongoing. And neither she nor her parents knew when either of them would back down. That night, she lay in bed awake. The scholarship interview was only a couple of days away. Her future was just in front of her. And so was the gap between her and her parents. And the darkness that fell on her bedroom wasn't enough to clear away what was on her mind. What if I win, she thought to herself. What will that mean... She wasn't sure she wanted to know.