

The bloom after the storm - Chapter 5 Chapter 4

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Aurora loathed parent-teacher meetings. It wasn't because she was in any kind of trouble. Quite the opposite, she was one of the top students in the school. The issue was simply that they tended to be incredibly awkward. Because the teachers went on and on about how wonderful Aurora was, she often didn't know where to place her gaze. Of course, her parents were always present at every parent-teacher meeting. Always. So she wasn't surprised when the date was announced. Not initially. The meeting was set for a Friday afternoon, and the students kept discussing it all throughout the week. "My dad said he's going to raise an issue about my maths teacher," Maya said at lunch. Aurora smiled. "My parents will probably just ask how to make me study less." "Sounds great." Aurora smiled, though it was a small smile. Everything had stopped feeling great lately. Her parents had never been anything less than polite. They had never once abandoned their duties, nor had they ever stopped being present. But they seemed increasingly distant. Like a sunset. Still, Aurora told herself that it would pass. That's what she told herself. Because they were her parents. What else could possibly be the problem? When Friday finally arrived, it seemed to come out of nowhere. For most of the day, she had helped decorate the classrooms in preparation for the event. When the class ended on that particular afternoon, her English teacher walked by her desk. She had been the first to stop by Aurora's table. "You are one to be proud of," the teacher said. Aurora smiled. "Thank you." "And your parents must be so proud of you." Aurora cringed. She nodded. "Sure they are." — By four o'clock, many of the students' parents were already inside. While their kids waited on the outside, teachers began to talk to them. Aurora had taken a seat at the edge of the school hallway, watching for her parents. She watched each new arrival, searching the crowd for them. And with every parent to come and go, her hope lessened. She began to think that perhaps she had simply made a mistake. That they were running a bit late. It was 4:30 when she saw them finally walk through the school gates. The realization hit Aurora like a bucket of ice water in the face. She smiled, jumped up, and waved. "Mom!" "Dad!" They waved back. But that was as far as their greeting went. The meeting lasted nearly an hour, during which the children waited outside. They were eager to hear what the teachers said to their parents. Aurora's parents stood out in the parking lot as her mom fiddled with the strap of her handbag. "How did it go?" Aurora asked as soon as she saw them. Her dad looked like she had hit a wall. It was fine. The teacher had probably gushed about her good grades for half an hour, yet that was their reaction? "That's all you had to say?" "What else are we supposed to say, dear?" "Fine?" "What else can we say?" Aurora

stared at them in silence. The walk back home was long. That night, she couldn't stop thinking about it, unable to sleep. Something was wrong, and she knew it. Parents didn't suddenly become cold for no reason. Did they? Maya called later on, interrupting her thoughts. "How did it go?" Maya asked. "I don't know." "Just okay?" "Something like that." Aurora sighed, then explained what had happened. Her mom hadn't smiled during the meeting. Her dad hadn't either. "Did they give you any feedback about anything?" "Not really." Maya fell silent. "Is everything still weird at home?" "Maybe." "What kind of weird?" Aurora told Maya the story. The lack of smiles. The curt replies. "Sounds pretty strange." Aurora stared at the wall. "It does." Now that she had said it out loud, she actually did think that. She was just making things up, right? Nothing had really changed. But she was starting to think that was exactly it. And it was more than she wanted to admit. That evening, while she lay in her bed, she heard her mother's voice coming from the hallway, just outside the door. She wasn't trying to eavesdrop, that was for sure. She really wasn't. "...she's becoming obsessed with leaving," she heard her mother say. A pause. Then, her father's voice. "I don't know her anymore." Aurora was silent as it happened, frozen in her room. She thought to herself about what to do, wanting to just open the door, and ask them what they meant. And then she wanted to just back away slowly, and return to her bed and her notebook in the drawer. It was her notebook that had previously been filled with hopes and dreams. But now it had just become proof of a rift that was growing between her and the people she loved most.