

The bloom after the storm - Chapter 8 Chapter 7

Čöldhēärt5-6 minutes

The next morning, Aurora showed up to class ahead of schedule. She told herself she wasn't thinking about Noah. She told herself, at least. The conversation in the library had simply stayed in her mind longer than expected. Nothing more. She eased into her chair right as the bell rang. When the English teacher entered, papers in her hand a few minutes later, students turned to greet her. "Good morning." "Good morning, ma'am." The woman set the pages down on her desk. "Today's the day we give you your final assignment for the term." Several students groaned. They ignored her. "This is a group project." The groan grew louder. Aurora looked over at Maya. "Pair us together, please," Maya whispered. Aurora grinned. "That's the spirit. See how you feel once you start doing work." The teacher called their classmates by name, one by one. Aurora listened, but not really. And then: "Aurora Hayes, with Noah Carter." It felt like everyone in the class held his breath. Aurora blinked. Maya's jaw went slack. "No way." Aurora spun around to see where her partner was. To her surprise, Noah looked shocked too. After the bell rang and class let out, people began crowding around their partners. Aurora moved slowly, gathering her things. Part of her hoped Noah would approach first. He didn't. Instead, he remained seated, reading through the project instructions. With a sigh, Aurora approached him. "Looks like we're partners." He turned a page. "Looks like it." He didn't complain about being her partner. He seemed totally okay with it. Aurora didn't understand why, but that made her smile. The project involved finding businesses in the community and making recommendations on how to enhance their products or services. Most people didn't like it. Aurora loved it. It was basically the type of work she liked. "Okay." Aurora leaned forward to get his attention. "Let's get started. When should we meet?" "Can we do the library after class today?" He turned to the instructions in his book. "Sure, that works." The library was filled the next day. Aurora found Noah in his usual seat by the window. He'd already filled pages of his notebook. She was a bit surprised. "Wow! You've already started?" Noah raised his eyes from his work. "Haven't we been told to?" "Haven't we?" Aurora couldn't remember her first day ever being the one who actually did the assignments. Noah didn't seem like your average high schooler. For an hour, they put their heads down to work. They went over the assignment. They discussed ideas for the project. They planned how to carry out the steps. Aurora began to notice something else. Noah was easy to talk to. There wasn't any awkward feeling between them. They could just talk normally. It felt like she'd made a friend without having to try. That felt good. Outside, the sun began to dip low in the sky. "Okay. I have a question for you." Noah paused. "Sure." Aurora took a moment before she said,

"Why did you transfer schools?" It took Noah a few seconds to respond. He closed his notebook. "My mom got a new job." Aurora nodded. "Just you and your mom?" "Yeah." "What do you actually want to do after school?" Aurora looked at the ceiling. "Honestly? I don't know. It feels like the future's way away from me." It hadn't occurred to her to think about life after college. She always thought about things happening in the present. She looked around the room until her eyes locked on Noah's. "I want to build something of my own. I don't know exactly what yet. But I want people to know my name someday." It came out sounding much more childish than she thought it would, but Noah didn't laugh at her. "No, that's not childish. It's cool. Your dreams aren't crazy at all, you'll make it happen." She looked at him. "You're good at this." "Good at what?" "Making things seem like everything's fine." Aurora smiled. "Life is fine sometimes. Some people just give up on their dreams too easily is all." She wasn't sure whether Noah was referring to her, but she didn't think it was important. They sat in silence for a few minutes more. Aurora was glad. There was no judgment on her. It was like she had just talked to someone who got her. She didn't know it yet, but they were going to become great friends over this project.