A New Leaf

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Summary

The day after Gloom-meister's attempt to plunge Garden City into permanent darkness and shadow, Bloom-meister stops by the city greenhouse to try and learn more about flowers.

It's barely been a day, Uniqua suddenly realizes.

The day before last she'd been a normal friendly flower seller, a basket of her favorite flowers on her arm as she made Garden City as rosy as she could. But then yesterday had been an absolute whirlwind — of powers and pollen and flying and and and — and shadows and manholes and darkness and the Gloom-meister, who's now the *Bloom*-meister, who's now —

"Wow, what's this one?"

"Oh, that? That's just a sunflower. There's a whole bunch of 'em on the highway out of the city."

"It's so tall!"

"Heh, and they can get even taller. A friend of mine's got one that goes 30 feet up!"

"Woah…"

— in her greenhouse.

In *Pablo's* greenhouse, Uniqua corrects herself, watching Bloom-meister follow her friend around. Something under her skin itches at the proximity. The only reason it doesn't bloom into a cloud of pollen is Bloom-meister's yellows and oranges and the easy smile on Pablo's face. She breathes in the scent of damp earth and humid air and thinks of green shoots poking out of ash and charcoal.

The door chimes jingle; a familiar voice calls out from the front. Pablo pauses mid-sentence to answer it — "Hey, Tyrone!" — and swings around some flowerbeds to meet their visitor before Uniqua could volunteer herself to do so. Bloom-meister makes to follow him, but changes his mind after a few steps. His eyes find hers, and she fights herself to keep his gaze; as a civilian, she thinks, she wouldn't have much of a reason to not. But Bloom-meister reads her internal determination as something else, it seems, by the way he winces, mouth twisting wry, and breaks eye contact with her first.

Uniqua busies herself with tending to the flowers, a familiar rhythm of soil and water and inspections and trimmings. When she re-surfaces, she notices — after a bit of guilt abut not minding a visitor — Bloom-meister leaning over a bed of daisies and whispering under his breath. "Man, you guys are really cool…" she hears him say as she ventures closer, curious. He's tracing the petals as if they were spun glass. "I wish I'd stopped being afraid of you sooner. You guys are just trying to make people happy. People like me!"

He laughs quietly — his real laugh, the one that doesn't grate against Uniqua's ears with its obnoxious bravado — and despite herself Uniqua softens. He really did want to learn about flowers, didn't he? It was hard to stay suspicious about someone like that.

So preoccupied with admiring the flowers, Bloom-meister starts when he turns his head just enough to see Uniqua out of the corner of his eye. "O-oh, hello!" he says, barely managing to

catch his balance before he face-plants into the very flowers he’d been admiring. “U-um, Uniqua…was it?”

Uniqua nods, biting back a grin at Bloom-meister's wide-eyed look. “Hey,” she says, “there are some seeds that need to be planted, do you wanna help?”

“Do I?!” Bloom-meister exclaims, loud in his excitement enough for Pablo and Tyrone — who are surely just gossiping now, instead of doing anything flower-related — pause their chat to glance over at them. Bloom-meister shrinks, embarrassed. “I mean, yes, please.” he says, quieter this time.

Uniqua chuckles, leading him to where they kept the seeds and listening to him mutter to himself about impressing Flower Girl. As if she wasn't already impressed with someone who only yesterday was terrified of flowers now getting his hands dirty in helping new ones grow. She could hardly ask for a better sidekick — not that she had asked in the first place, seeing as he’d volunteered himself for the position almost as soon as he’d changed his name.

Midway through their task, Uniqua sneaks a glance at Bloom-meister and his face scrunched up in single-minded concentration as he carves holes in the soil. She wonders to herself how these flowers will grow under his watch, from seed to bud to bloom. And how he’ll grow and bloom under her watch, and how she’ll bloom with him.

Today, Garden City, he’d said. Tomorrow, the world, she’d joined him. Right now, though, were these seeds and themselves to nurture, which was as good a start as any for a bright, beautiful garden.

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