

A Blooming *Spring* Love

Books in this series:

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A
Blooming
Spring
Love

Seasons on the Island 3

Emily Engberts

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ISBN 9789493139305

NUR: 344

20210105

1



Dani

Dad is staring at me, a huge grin on his face, a smile I can't ignore. He holds up a beam of the greenhouse as I'm attaching it. It's the end of the afternoon of my first day in my new house, and we're building the greenhouse in the garden. Inside, it's all still a huge mess, but my mum and Rose, my daughter, are sorting things out there. Max, my beautiful Schapendoes, a Dutch Sheepdog, keeps walking from the house to us and back, trying to be helpful wherever he goes but mostly just being in the way, as the lovely silly creature tends to do.

"You can stop looking at me like that." I try to glare at Dad, but the smile on my face doesn't help much. I've not been able to stop smiling for the last two weeks, ever since

I signed the papers for this house.

“Why? Why am I not allowed to be proud of you?” He raises an eyebrow at me.

“You are. Just... Just not by staring at me like that.” I drill the beam into place, we only have a few beams left to go, before we have to put in the windows, which finishes up the structure.

“Why not? I’m proud of you. Raising your little girl on your own like that, having a career, saving enough money, and then finally moving here. I just can’t hide how proud I am of you.” Just hearing him say those things makes my cheeks go warm. Dad being proud of what I do never really crossed my mind, but at the same time, it feels good to make him proud, to make both my parents proud.

We grab the next beam and as he holds it, I fasten it into place.

I don’t know what to tell him, how to explain that it was all just a matter of surviving for me. Of trying to keep going and not lose my mind or my grounding. So many of the things that have happened in the last few years have not been by my own choice.

Two years ago, the woman who I thought was the love of my life, who I’d been with for over five years, walked out on us, she didn’t want what we had, our little family, and she’d decided that instead of talking to me, she’d just make

her own plans. One morning, after a gruelling night with Rose, who'd caught some flu or something at the day care she'd been attending, I walked into a kitchen filled with bags and boxes. Rose's bedroom had been upstairs, while ours was downstairs, so I hadn't even realised that my ex had been packing... That was it. She left that same day, leaving everything to me in the divorce apart from the things that she'd taken with her in those boxes that morning. I had a house to live in, I had some resemblance of a life and I had our daughter.

She hadn't just walked out on me, but also on our daughter, Rose. Back then, Rose was too small to understand what was going on, why Mummy didn't come home anymore, why... why the house had gone so quiet suddenly. That day, I realised that there were only two things important in my life, my own independence and giving Rose the best life that I could. I didn't want to be dependent on anyone any more, I wanted everything in my own hands, I didn't want to be surprised like that ever again.

And now, I finally made that happen. With Rose in primary school, I was able to focus on my career more, and by doing that, I was able to buy us a house on Schiermonnikoog. Not just any house... A house with enough land that I could have my own garden, enough to be able to grow and sell flowers and other things in the small

store at the front of the building. I made it all happen. Not by choice, but by necessity. I had to, so that something like this could never happen to us again.

Dad puts his hand on my shoulder, squeezing a little. When I look at him, his eyes are a little sad, but also warm. “I know that it’s been really hard on you. I know that things haven’t been easy. But I’m still very proud that you’ve managed to do this. I’m still very proud that you were able to do all this, make it all come true.”

I nod, smiling a little at him. My parents really helped me in the last years, and it’ll sometimes be hard to not be as close to them anymore. “And if you ever miss me, you can always come stay in the studio.” I point to the small building at the end of the garden. Almost all the houses here, at least most of the ones I saw, have a possibility to rent out either part of the house or a small building outside, usually a type of shed or studio. And, of course, this one came with one too. It’ll provide a little extra income, which will be nice.

We efficiently finish putting up the final beams and start on the windows. If everything goes as planned, I’ll be able to start putting plants and flowers in it in the next few days, after I’ve made sure that it’s leak proof and everything.

My life may have fallen apart two years ago, but I’ve finally gotten to the place where I really wanted to be. I finally made my own dream come true.



I spread the papers and notebooks out in front of me. I'm trying to plan what I'll be doing in the next weeks, because if I don't plan, things won't happen. Firstly, of course, there are plants and flowers that I'm going to have to put into the greenhouse. Growing up the different seedlings and things like that, and maybe buying a few small plants of other plants. I have some experience growing plants in my kitchen and on the balcony, but no experience in an actual greenhouse, outside, and of that size. Or experience growing plants to sell off again.

This first year is going to be interesting, I'm pretty sure of that. The idea is to start growing flowers and vegetables and even some fruit. We'll use the fruit and vegetables for our own food, live off our own land, and then use the flowers and maybe some spices and things like that to sell. At least, that's the idea.

I'm not exactly sure how well everything is going to work, but that's okay. I've got my own writing career, I make enough money writing books to support us, and then some. But running a small shop like this, it's been a dream of mine for years, for decades probably. For this first year, all I'm hoping is to not have too much of a loss for the shop side of things, starting small, minimal loss is all I'm going

for.

For the greenhouse and the garden, I'm thinking some practical things first, like broccoli, tomatoes, paprikas and a few other edible plants. That should at least get me going for our own food. When it comes to flowers... Well... I'll have to see about those. It's too early in the year to really sell many flowers, apart from some bulb plants. So, for the shop side of things, I'll have to figure out both the space I have, and my own abilities.

Of course, especially right now, running the garden and the shop won't take up even most of my day, so the rest of the day I'll be dedicating to my writing, trying to keep up the schedule I've been keeping to for the last two years, the schedule that made me able to realise this dream in the first place.

When I started out with the writing, trying to work my schedule around Rose's naps and things like that, wasn't very easy. Of course, when I still had the help of my ex, that was much more doable, but when she left... it all came down on me. I had to do everything by myself then. So I learned to work around her nap times, I learned when I would be able to multi-task and I learned when to ask my parents to look after my little girl for a couple of hours in exchange for a homemade dinner. Last year, when Rose went to primary school, I was finally able to get a better publishing schedule

down, especially since I then knew when and how I could be working, that made things a lot easier. I suddenly had hours and hours of uninterrupted time to work, and my publishing output went through the roof.

I lean back in the chair, stretching my back and then I look out over the darkening garden. I pull my robe around me tighter, just staring out the window over our new place. I made it happen, I really did. Now I just need to keep going.

I hear Rose's footsteps on the stairs inside the house, and the next moment, she darts into the conservatory. She's holding her favourite plush toy against her chest, looking at me with big eyes. Max follows her closely behind, excited that there is movement in the house.

"What's wrong, baby?" I reach out to her and she takes my hand, then she climbs into my lap, putting her head against my chest.

"It's so strange here." Her eyes dart around and my heart breaks a little at the confused look in her eyes. "The sounds are all different. And it smells different. Everything is different."

I stand up, lifting her with me, and then I carry her back inside, locking the door behind me. "I know it's different, but this is our new house. Getting used to new places is always a little scary." I carry her in my arms, Max at my heels, as I check the front door and then turn the lights off

in all the downstairs rooms. Most of them are still mostly empty, only filled with boxes, but the kitchen has a table to sit at and there is a TV and couch in the living room. We'll finish up the rest tomorrow. "Say goodnight to Max." I turn so that Rose can see him.

"Goodnight." She blows a kiss at him, a satisfied smile on her face.

"Goodnight Max." I ruffle my fingers in his fur and he sits down on his little mat next to the stairs. He knows he's not allowed upstairs, and I think he's too chicken to even try it right now. I walk up the stairs with Rose and then step into her room. "You'll get used to this place soon enough. You'll get used to the quiet and the new sounds in no time." I smile as I put her into her bed again.

She looks at me in a way that tells me that she's not convinced about what I'm saying. Gone are the times when she'd just believe me when I'd tell her things. But that newfound curiosity also makes me smile so much. "When?" she demands. This is the first time she's ever moved house and we've even barely gone on holiday, especially since going on holiday with just Rose seemed like a lot of work for me, and holidays are supposed to be less work. The only other place she knows is her grandparents' house, so this is all brand new for her.

Give her a soft kiss on her forehead. "I don't know. But

we will. I promise. You'll forget that everything sounds strange before you even realise it." I pull the covers over her more, tucking her in. Then I quietly leave her room, looking back at her at the door. "I'll be right across the hall from you. I'll leave the doors open, and the light on in the hallway, so you don't have to worry." I think I can see her nod in the darkness and I can't help the smile on my lips as I look at my beautiful and brave little girl.

She's not the only one who will have to get used to all the quiet, but I really do believe that moving here is going to make things a lot better for the both of us. It'll be a new start. Away from everything that still bound us to the past, that bound me to the past.

This is our future. This is where we'll make our dreams come true.

This is my new life.

2



Kim

The early morning on Monday after a break is never fun and it's always so much harder than any other Monday, usually because I do like to sleep in when I have the opportunity, and a week off work means a lot of opportunity to sleep in. But with Valentine's Day behind us, and the weather getting better, I'm definitely ready for the next project with my class.

Teaching the littlest ones at the school, the four and five year olds, is so much fun. I love to see them grow in just the two years that they're with me, it's always such a pleasure. I don't really have a wish to do anything else career wise, to 'advance' to a different class or something like that. I love these early years, they're so much fun. I'm much better with

learning through play than sitting down and doing numbers or things like that.

I slowly move around the house, grabbing my breakfast, a black coffee and a sandwich with cheese, before I sit down at the kitchen table with my tablet and some folders. It's the start of March, which means that spring is coming soon and with spring comes projects to do with plants and baby animals, the start of life. Every season has their own theme. Spring is for flowers and baby animals, summer is for fruits and different flowers, then fall is for the falling leaves and the fruits and vegetables that are ripe then and, finally, winter is for snow and the things different animals do to survive the winter, and, of course, the holidays.

But another advantage of spring is that there will be more sun again, which always improves my mood a lot. It's easier to be more upbeat when the skies are blue, there is sun out, even though it's still cold, and everywhere you look is bright green from the new leaves with spots of colours from flowers that bloom this early. Last week I saw the first snowdrops and crocuses with their pale purple flowers. Seeing the first flowers of the year is always a special feeling.

I sort through the project folders from previous years. I've done a lot of projects over time, most of them having to do with colours and flowers and things like that. Spring projects are always some of my favourites, especially

because it's all so bright and upbeat.

This year, I want to have some bulb flowers in the windows, probably some hyacinths and maybe a few other ones that will bloom brightly. That will keep the joy inside the classroom, even on the rainier days. And then we can make plants and flowers from paper and carton, folding them and gluing and such. That will be fun and I have a couple of projects already ready from previous years.

We could probably do a stage of the plant every week, like the seeds and bulbs the first week, then the parts of the plant as it grows for the second week and then maybe flowers on the third week, or whatever I can come up with in between. And, of course, there is the changing weather and the young animals to talk about too. I tend to do some freehand planning with these things, especially because the young ones really just do whatever they like, so teaching to a strict plan doesn't always work out the best for me.

We should probably go on a trip around the town to see all the flowers that are now coming up and maybe even go see the little lambs that are born on the farm around this time. They always love to see the lambs. I should probably contact one of the farmers about this.

I write down a few notes for ideas, slowly getting my head back into the teaching mindset.

Maybe I should talk to Kara and Rik, teachers from the

older grades, see if they also have ideas, maybe share a couple of them. I'm already getting excited and I've barely even started... Most of last week I've spent at home, just reading and enjoying the calm, I didn't do too much work, I was really ready for some time off. But now I need to get back to work.

After a week off, I'm definitely ready to start again.

I finish off the coffee and get myself a second mug.

Then, I see a note in my planner. 'New girl arrives, Rose.' Oh, yeah. We've got a new girl coming in today, she just moved here. I didn't even know that she'd join my class until right before the break started. I totally forgot about that.

The family moved into one of the houses on the shopping street, on the side that looks out over the fields towards the mudflats, with the big-ish gardens. The house hadn't even been for sale for very long. The woman who used to live there moved to the mainland with her children, apparently going to the secondary school here wasn't for them, so they went to the mainland to go to secondary school there. It's not uncommon for that to happen. But this house was sold really fast, and I heard from Kara that the new owner moved in just before the weekend. So they've not even really settled in yet.

So, right, new girl. We'll have to do something fun to

get her involved with the group. The kids will love it, having a new girl in the group. They always love it when someone new joins them, it doesn't happen that often that someone nobody knows joins us since most of the kids already know each other. The island is only small, so all the kids tend to know each other.

This is going to be fun.



I open the door of the classroom, looking out over the cosy place, and quickly open a window a little before I go to the storage room and pick up another small chair. We'll need one for the new girl.

On my way back to my classroom, I find Kara standing in the hallway, a silly grin on her face as she looks at her phone.

"Hey." I stand in front of her and try to catch her attention.

She jolts for a moment and then looks at me, her eyes sparkling. "Hey." She grins, she looks very happy.

"Your break was good, I presume?" I can't help my own smile. Kara only moved here a couple of weeks ago, but she fell for the daughter of the owner of the book store in no-time. It's been really fun to see them flirt and be a little awkward together. But things got more serious over Valentine's and I've not heard much from her since, which

I take as a good sign.

“Very good.” She lets out a laugh. “Yours?”

“Nothing exciting.” I smile her way. “Just enjoyed myself with small things.”

“That’s also good.” She pushes herself off the wall as I hear kids and parents come into the hallway. The first kids are arriving.

“I’ve got to get ready for a new girl.” I hold up the chair a little.

“I’ve got to get ready for a whole class of kids fresh from a break.” She grins but then stops for a moment. “Do you want to come over for dinner this weekend?”

“This weekend?” I raise my eyebrow.

“I’ve got some friends coming over from the mainland, and I thought that you could use some time with people over the age of six but under the age of seventy.” She winks.

I let out a laugh. “Sure.” I’ve got some people on the island that I would call sort-of-friends, but I’ve found that Kara is one of those people who attracts others and just pulls them into a group, making everyone feel welcome.

“Cool. I’ll let you know the details later this week.” She nods my way and steps into her classroom.

“Hi, miss Kim.” Mila, one of the kids who used to be in my class but who’s now in Kara’s class, greets me as she steps past me.

“Morning, Mila. Did you have a good break?”

“Yes.” She grins. “My cat had kittens. Six of them. They’re so cute!” She’s almost shaking with excitement as she shows me a print of a picture. “They’re so small.”

I look at the picture, seeing six small furry beans in a range of colours, all crawled up next to a beautiful black and white mother. “Ah, really cute.” I smile. “Did you name them yet?”

Mila shakes her head. “Not yet. Dad says that it’s too early.” Her face goes a little more serious. “Dad says that we have to wait a week before we name them, and that only he is allowed to hold them right now.” That definitely makes sense from a parenting point of view, but it’s obviously not as much fun for the girl.

“Well, let’s hope everything goes well then, right?” I smile at her and get a big smile in return.

“Yes.” Then she looks over to Kara. “Miss Kara, look! Kittens!” She holds up the paper and I can’t help my laugh. Kids.

I turn and go over to my own classroom. As I step into the classroom, one of the youngest ones in the class, Lars, is already sitting near the table with sand, running his fingers through the sand, playing with it. “Morning, Lars.”

He looks up, frowning a little. “Morning, miss.” Then he goes back to playing with the sand. Someone is not

having a good morning, I see.

I smile a little, everyone has their own speed, his is not the best in the morning. Then I make a circle of all the chairs in the middle of the room, putting the new chair next to mine.

All the chairs have names on them, makes it easier for the kids to find them and teaches letter recognition and such. So I go over to my desk and pull out a paper, making a name sticker for the new girl too.

As I'm about to put the sticker on the chair, I catch movement near the door. I get ready to greet whoever it is, only to be stunned by the woman standing in the doorway. She's got beautiful red hair, which is a little wild around her head right now, she's wearing a nice looking jacket, but her jeans are full of stains that look like mud. At her side is a little girl, her hair as red as her mother's.

This must be the new girl! And, her mother.

I stand up straight, going over to the door. "Good morning." I feel my cheeks heat up a little as I catch her gaze, she's got amazingly green eyes, like the colour of spring leaves.

"Good morning." The woman looks around the classroom. "Are these the first and second years?"

"We are." I nod, looking at the small girl. She looks mostly curious, although she seems a little reserved too.

“Then we’re in the right place.” The woman smiles and it brightens her eyes up even more, like sunshine, then she kneels down in front of the girl. “This is your new classroom. Look. It’s really pretty, right?”

The girl nods, her eyes going over everything in the room.

I also go down to her height. “I’m going to be your teacher. My name is miss Kim. What’s your name?” Of course, I know her name, but it’s always good to ask.

“Rose.” She shyly smiles, her eyes darting over to her mother.

“Welcome, Rose. Do you want to go play with something?” I saw a shimmer in her eyes as she caught a glimpse of something in the corner with the books.

“Yes, please.” She looks at her mum and then back at me.

Her mother lets out a laugh, a sound so light. “Go, play. I’ll tell you goodbye when I leave.”

Rose nods and is off to something in the book corner. We both look after her and then I look back at her mother.

She holds out her hand, pushing her hair behind her ear with the other one. I can see even more dirt on her hand as she does so. What was she up to before she came here?

I take her hand, she’s got a strong grip and soft skin for

someone who looks like she just pulled herself out of a garden patch. “Kim.” I smile at her.

“Dani. Rose’s mum.” Then she falls quiet.

“I heard you just moved here?” Kind of, duh, but whatever.

“Yeah.” Her eyes immediately sparkle and she breaks out in a grin. “I saw the house, the garden, and I just had to live there. It’s like a dream. I’m not so sure yet that I really realise what I just did, but that will set in at some point, probably.” A dream. Of course. This is definitely some bold dream.

“Well, reality will set in soon enough. Right?” I look over to the classroom and catch Rose going over to Lars carefully, looking at what he’s doing.

“I don’t know. Maybe I hope that I’ll never wake up from this dream.” She grins. “Opening my own flower shop, living on the island...” Somehow her smile goes even bigger, making my stomach do a little flip.

“A flower shop?”

“Yes. Hoping to open it soon-ish. It depends on how quickly I can grow things and how quickly I can get suppliers set up and everything.” She really sounds like she’s talking about a dream. “I should probably have done more research before I did this, but that’s never really been my

thing... I tend to do before I think.”

Dani’s got something ethereal over her, but at the same time, she doesn’t look like she’s just dreaming, she looks like she’s actually realising a dream. Such a big dream too.

Such a big dream.