

The Last Day She Doesn't Miss



Illustration coming soon

For ages 15-18



Chapter 1: The Good News in the Bad Envelope

The letter says the program will not reopen in September.

Aderes reads it twice. She knows the words the first time. The second time, she is waiting for the feeling that ought to go with them.

The girls' school program is small. It has a narrow staircase, a library that occupies half a cupboard, and a history teacher who notices when somebody asks a real question instead of searching for the one sentence that earns a nod.

It also has a class where every returned paper begins a quiet hunt for everybody else's marks. Aderes never finds a graceful way to refuse the hunt. By lunchtime, her own number seems to have walked around the room without her permission.

The adults explain the closure and the next arrangements to the families. It is not a decision the girls cause or can fix by being better students. Other approved school places will have to be arranged with their parents.

Aderes is seventeen. She is supposed to be old enough to understand all that.





What she understands first is that she will not walk up the narrow stairs again in September.

Her shoulders loosen.

Then she feels ashamed.





Chapter 2: Everybody's Favorite Year

At school the next morning, her friend holds the letter by one corner.

"Can you believe it?"

"No," Aderes says.

It is not the answer to the question she hears underneath.

Her friend is furious. She likes the small class and the familiar teachers. She wants one more year in a place where she knows which floorboard announces a late entrance.

"These are the best years," she says.

"Some of them are good."

The friend looks up.

"Some?"

Aderes wants to make the word disappear.

"I mean, obviously not every day."

"Don't be so literal."





She has a talent for sounding unreasonable when she is trying to say something exactly.

The teacher announces a final afternoon for the class and asks each girl for one memory she is willing to share. Nobody has to make a speech. They can write a short page or contribute to a display.

The friend starts immediately. Her first line says she never wants to leave.

Aderes's page stays blank.

She does not want to write that line. She does not want to write its opposite either.





Chapter 3: The Part Under the Relief

Mama finds the blank page on the kitchen table.

Mama sits beside Aderes.

"Do you need a memory?"

"I have memories."

"Then what's missing?"

Aderes holds the pencil horizontally.

"The right feeling."

She describes the letter, the loose shoulders, and how quickly she stops herself enjoying either.

Mama listens.

"What are you relieved about?"

"The marks. The way everyone asks. The way I hear an answer and think about whether I sound clever enough before I ask my question."

"Have you told the teacher about the mark questions?"





"Once. She said we could keep them private. Then the girls kept asking, and I gave them my marks."

Mama does not treat that as proof the problem is Aderes's fault. She asks whether the school needs to know the pressure continues and whether Aderes wants help setting a clearer limit for the remaining days.

"Maybe. But I'm also relieved about not having to do another year there."

"You can tell me that."

"What about the history teacher? She's so good to us."

"Your shoulders aren't giving a report on her teaching."

Aderes looks at the blank page.

"It feels like they are."

"Then we can separate the parts. You appreciate her. You dislike the pressure. You're worried about the closure. You're relieved about a change. Which part has to be false?"

Aderes does not find one.

She also does not feel instantly generous about the school. Mama does not ask her to.





Chapter 4: A Memory With a Door

During the last history lesson, the teacher brings out a map with an error printed near the border.

Aderes remembers it. Earlier in the year, she noticed that the same river seemed to cross itself. The teacher did not tell her the printer must know better. She got another map and helped the class compare them.

"Does anyone remember what we found?" the teacher asks.

Aderes raises her hand.

For once, she does not search the room first to see who else knows.

Afterward, she asks to speak privately.

She tells the teacher that the repeated questions about marks make some of the remaining days difficult. She wants the class's private-paper rule backed up when girls keep asking after a no.

The teacher listens and agrees to address that behavior without asking Aderes to list her marks or perform the complaint in front of the class.

Aderes also tells her she wants to write about the map for the farewell.





"I remember your question," the teacher says. "You weren't sure whether the print was wrong or you were reading it wrong."

"I was sure everyone would think the second."

"You asked anyway."

The teacher has something else to do. The conversation ends without Aderes telling her she feels relieved about the closure.

That private feeling is not a debt she has to pay to every person she thanks.





Chapter 5: The Memory That Is Not Enough

Her friend reads the map paragraph.

It describes the river, the second map, and the relief of asking a question that leads somewhere.

"That's it?"

"It's one memory."

"It sounds as if you don't care about leaving."

Aderes closes her folder.

"I care. I don't feel the same way you do."

"What does that mean?"

The honest answer is not a sentence Aderes wants to offer in the crowded classroom.

"I'm going to miss some things. I'm also ready for some things to change."

Her friend looks hurt.

"I thought we were happy here."





Aderes thinks of the afternoon they made a geography model with one mountain so large it blocked the other country's sun. She thinks of the teacher lending her a book. Those afternoons are not counterfeit because her shoulders loosen over a letter.

"We have been happy sometimes," she says. "That doesn't mean every part has worked for me."

"You should have told me."

"Maybe I should have said more. I'm saying it now."

She leaves out the speech she could make about the mark hunt.

Her friend is one of the girls who asks, but this conversation is about their different response to leaving. The classroom behavior has its own boundary and adult support.

Her friend does not agree.

She gives the page back.





Chapter 6: The Final Afternoon

At the farewell, some girls cry. Aderes does not.

She worries that people will inspect her dry eyes more closely than her written memory.

Then she notices that most people are occupied with their own faces, pages, and cups of juice. Her friend needs a tissue. Aderes passes one.

Offering it does not require matching the tears.

The history teacher reads the map paragraph with Aderes's permission. She reads other girls' memories too. One is about an excursion Aderes barely remembers; another is about a school meal nobody regards as fine cooking.

People laugh.

Aderes laughs. She feels the kind of fondness that comes from recognizing a place, not from being required to defend all of it.

When they clear the table, her friend says she is sorry Aderes seems not to understand.

"I understand you don't want to leave," Aderes says. "I'm not pretending you should be pleased."





The friend nods slowly.

"I don't understand your part."

"You don't have to feel it. I just don't want to pretend I don't have it."

They put the cups in the collection box. Their hands can do the same job while their minds hold different versions of the afternoon.





Chapter 7: No Guaranteed Fresh Start

Over the summer, Aderes and her parents arrange the next school year. They ask about the actual program, expectations, and available support. No one calls the new school perfect because it is new to her.

Aderes wants to arrive as a girl who never worries about marks.

Mama says she can arrive as Aderes. They can plan how she will respond to unwanted mark questions and whom she can ask for help if pressure continues.

They rehearse one plain line: "I'm keeping my result private. What did you think of the last question?"

It is not a magical line. Someone can still ask again. Aderes can repeat the boundary, change the conversation, and seek adult help rather than giving the number to end the discomfort.

Her friend sends a letter about her family's plans for the new term. She includes a memory Aderes does not include in her own farewell page.

Aderes smiles at it.

She writes back about the enormous geography mountain.





She does not write, "You were right; everything was wonderful."

She does not need to settle the whole argument to keep a real shared memory.





Chapter 8: A Different Staircase

In September, the new staircase is wider.

Aderes notices that first and feels ridiculous for noticing it. A staircase is not a promise about people.

A girl beside her asks whether they are in the same class. They compare the room numbers and find that they are.

During the lesson, Aderes wants to ask a question. She hears the old worry before she lifts her hand.

The worry comes with her. The narrow staircase does not.

She asks.

The teacher answers part of it and says they will return to the second part after reading further. It is neither a disaster nor a special demonstration that Aderes has found her proper place in the world.

At lunch, the other girl asks which school she comes from.

Aderes names the program.

"Did you like it?"





She thinks about the map, the marks, the farewell, and the letter at the kitchen table.

"Parts of it very much."

The girl nods. She does not demand a single verdict.

Aderes asks about her school. The answer is complicated too.

They find room for both lunches on the table.

