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NOIRACIEL

CHAPTER 16 · BORROWED TIME

The Borrowed Afternoons

A story about time that comes as a gift

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Last winter, Valentin's grandfather got very sick.

He was in hospital for three weeks, which was the longest three weeks of Valentin's life. The house felt strange without him — too quiet in some places, too loud in others, as if the rooms didn't know how to behave.

Then, gradually, his grandfather got better.

This was not the expected thing. The doctors said so themselves, in careful voices. His grandfather came home thinner and slower, with a new walking stick and a list of things he wasn't allowed to eat. But he came home.

Something was different after that.

Before the illness, Valentin's grandfather had been busy — always on his way somewhere, always with something to do. A committee meeting, a neighbour to visit, a garden that needed work. Their time together was in the gaps between things.

Now he had nowhere to be.

On Saturdays, Valentin would arrive at the old house and his grandfather would already be in the garden, in his chair by the lemon tree, apparently waiting for nothing in particular. Valentin would sit next to him and they

would talk — really talk, the kind of talking where no one was looking at the time.

His grandfather told him things he'd never said before. About being young. About choices he'd made that he'd have made differently, and some he wouldn't change for anything. About Valentim's grandmother, who had died before Valentim was born, and what she was like.

One afternoon Valentim said, "Why didn't you tell me these things before?"

His grandfather was quiet for a moment. "I didn't think there was a rush," he said.

He looked at the lemon tree, which was heavy with fruit.

"I was wrong about that," he said. "I was wrong about the rush."

Valentim thought about that on the bus home. About how easy it was to assume there would always be more time — next week, next year, when things settled down. He thought about the people in his own life he wanted to really talk to.

He took out his phone and called his mother. Not for any reason. Just to talk.

*We always think there will be more time. Sometimes, we're lucky
enough to be reminded that we should use the time we have.*

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A companion to "Borrowed Time"

Contributions help fund The Invisible Roots Scholarship —
supporting students who carry invisible roots.

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