

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

Summary: Daffodil Days is the coming-of-age story of Daphne Jacobs, a recent high school graduate, still living in her hometown trying to figure out her life. The novel follows her relationships and friendships throughout her first year on her own. She begins the book lovesick over a friend and ends the book with a new understanding of herself.

She bit her bottom lip. Her eyes were watering and her hands were shaking.

“Too much damn caffeine” She exhaled, blinking through the tears.

Daphne Jacobs knew it wasn't the end of the world. It wasn't even the end of her world. She was supposed to only have 10 days with them anyway. What's 10 days? Two seconds in her life. But the little fur balls grew on her fast and she yearned for one more scratch from their needle claws.

“Stupid poop machines” She told herself as she drove back from animal control. She didn't have the money or the responsibility for two kittens. She didn't even know why she accepted the foster kittens in the first place. Why did she keep doing this to herself? Setting herself up for heartbreak. Not even heart break, can you even experience heartbreak over a creature you barely met? Maybe I just like to torture myself. She didn't voice this last thought, just kept it swimming around in her brain. She seemed to find distractions from her melancholy feelings and then those distractions would result in a deeper hole of feelings. Modest Mouse pounded on the car stereo, “Everything that keeps me together is falling apart”.

With her body on auto-pilot she finally realized she had driven herself not home but to her home away from home. She pulled in to Starbucks #53576, her Starbucks, and her

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

embarrassingly pitiful second home. It wasn't endlessly pathetic, it's where most of her friends worked, except for actually her. It's where they spent late night hours lounging around the parking lot long after the lights went off inside. It's where she curled up in big expensive leather chairs and guzzled down books along with complimentary drinks. It's where she went before dates and slinked to after those dates crashed and burned so that she could lick her wounds with the help of chai teas and friendly banter. It was her crew's clubhouse and she wasn't all that shocked that her car ended up driving there when her mind was miles away, even though her plans were to go home and collapse into her kitten free bed.

Dylan was working the register and whistled when she walked in. She didn't even have the emotional energy to roll her eyes.

"Well you look like shit mixed with hair balls," he said.

"Yeah, fuck you too" She numbly spat back at him.

"Wow. Is that anyway to get a free latte?" He laughed.

"Just a small coffee, black" Daphne stated, not asked, with eyes locking with Stephen.

"Sounds like you are punishing your taste buds," Stephen joined the conversation.

"Sounds like she is finally appreciating the decadence of our limited-time, small batch Nicaragua blend" Nate energetically added while passing a steaming cup over the counter.

Stephen rolled his eyes; he was an extra cream and sugar kind of coffee drinker. She grasped the ceramic mug, hoping the sudden heat would burn her, that's what she deserved. Instead, it was actually soothing. Her fingers picked at one of her many hemp and leather bracelets that slinked around her wrists. She tapped her thumb wring, made from a shell, on the counter top and sighed dramatically.

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

The whole crew that worked there were extreme caffeine addicts, all having extreme preferences going along with their habit. Nate drank only coffee or espresso, always black, to appreciate the brew. Dylan preferred green tea, which ended up having more caffeine than most brews anyway. And Stephen loved all drinks, as long as he could customize them. He didn't even have a style, unless mad scientist was a culinary style when it came to being a barista. Maybe it was. The quickest way to his heart was to be a little old lady who wanted to try something new. He bent over backwards to impress those little old ladies. He said they deserved some attention and couldn't help but be impressed by an octogenarian that wanted to try a little innovation at that age. Stephen was a big guy with a big heart. He had messy, unkempt brown hair that was neither straight nor curly. However, it always curled a bit at the ends near his temples where he would sweat. Stephen was a sweaty guy. He sweat when he was working hard, he sweat when he was playing guitar, and he sweat when he got really worked up in a conversation. He always tried to cover it with nice smelling cologne and deodorants and lots of showers but he was a big guy and he lived in sunny, hot south Florida. So what could you do?

“What's going on my little daffodil?” Stephen asked sweetly in slightly a “mama bear”-esque tone.

“Today is the 9th” She sighed into her cup while sliding it lazily back and forth, twisting it in the plate it sat atop of.

“You obviously didn't catch her snap this morning, today is the day that is bye bye kitties” Dylan answered.

“Aw Daph, you knew this was coming,” Stephen couldn't help but now take on a ‘I told you this would happen’ tone. A ‘who said this idea would break your heart? Me, that's who’

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

kind of tone. The 'I'm the one who everyone said was being a downer, well who's a downer now?!' kind of tone.

Normally she was quick to fall into a Stephen snuggle or breathe in his comforting words, but now she was just mad. Mad at Stephen, mad at herself, and just mad.

“When does Silas get here?” She wasn't sure why she was wondering. Well she was sure, she had been avoiding most of his shifts since everything got weird. She and Silas, like the rest of the group, had been friends since her freshman year of high school. The boys had actually all been friends since 1st grade, but they went to a different elementary and middle school than her and plus they were 2 years older. She just graduated a few weeks earlier and was soon to be a freshman in the local community college majoring in “I don't know what I'm doing but I'm taking a random class here and there at community college like everyone else”. Except for Stephen, he was an amazing artist, unfortunately, without any self-discipline or drive. Daphne was convinced he could be immensely successful, except he always procrastinated when any sort of job offer got serious. Even when she found art contests that were perfect for him or offered to start an Etsy account for the work he had completed, he just found a way to change the conversation.

“He called out, said he was spewing chunks”

“Ew, gross Nate!” Daphne exclaimed while launching a straw across the espresso machine hitting him directly between the eyes. His easy smile smeared across his face and they all chuckled.

“Uh oh, you fucked up Daph's sulky, pathetic vibe she was rocking,” Dylan jabbed Nate playfully, but Nate was quick with a gentle kick to his shin.

“Fuck you, I am sad. I fell in love, I was in love! My heart feels shattered. I am numb.”

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

“Well are you sad or numb? I don’t think you can be both ‘cause they kind of contradict each other. I mean I know I’ve been out of school for a bit but I’m pretty sure those are two different emotions that don’t mix” Dylan mused while continuing to play karate fight Nate. His messy hair heavily swayed every time he dramatically dodged an oncoming swing...karate chop? Dylan was one of those brooding, tall, and handsome guys who looked like he belonged in Seattle and not sunny Florida. His father was Norwegian and his mother was Cuban and Dylan won the genetic lottery. Those two could’ve produced a funky looking offspring but no, Dylan was gorgeous. He had wavy brown hair with natural honey highlights, a strong jaw, pale blue eyes, and muscular arms. Plus on top of looks, he rocked a local vibe via the Cuban side and the foreigner mystique via the Nordic roots as well. On the other hand, there’s Nate who was the most quintessential beachy South Florida kid there could be. His hair was short and mousy brown, his skin was perpetually sun kissed and freckled from practically living at the beach. He manage to surf almost every morning, and his days off were spent driving up the coast to catch better breaks. Surfing in Florida was nothing like California but it was still a lifestyle. And once or twice a year his dad, himself, his brother, and his cousins would go to Costa Rica for a week or two for real waves.

Daphne sighed and nestled down into her favorite leather armchair. The rest of the afternoon was spent with Daphne reading, Nate and Stephen trying to write song lyrics, and Dylan texting with some new girl he met the week before. A slow trickle of customers flowed in and out but it was a pretty quiet day. The sunshine blasted through the window at a certain part of the every evening, even with the blinds pulled shut. This evening, the sudden blast of light woke Daphne with a jump and she squeaked. Nate and Dylan cracked up, they told her she looked like a hobo all passed out on one of the chairs.

DAFFODIL DAYS BY MELANIE LEIVERS

“I know ma’am, you just wanted to charge your phone. But no bathing in that bathroom, ok?” Dylan sternly told her before cracking a smile.

“Hey, I’ve had a long day. Be nice. I’m emotionally exhausted.”

“Which you did to yourself!” Stephen called from across the room as he wiped down tables.

“I’m gonna go home and grab some dinner. Wash the cat off of me too. Be back around closing?” She asked the last part as a question but it wasn’t really. As usual, she’d come back to hang with the guys. Whether they ended up in their little town’s downtown area, or at the beach, or just waste hours in the parking lot. She’d end up back with her guys.