

The Daffodils

by Samantha Cummins

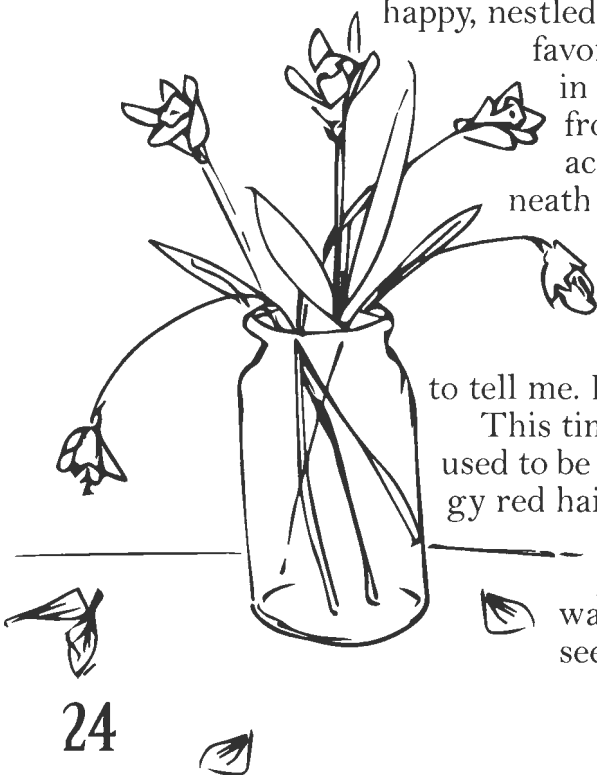
Click. Click. Click. Click. I woke up to the faithful clock, counting every second. My leg was asleep. I tried to shift my position to get comfortable again. For some reason, every part of my body ached. What did I do last night that made me so sore? I don't remember having practice. Maybe it was from climbing the lookout tower with James.

James. I smiled. I squinted my eyes and focused on the vase of flowers on the table next to my bed. The yellow petals reached out of the blue vase. I just love daffodils. They look like shooting stars. How did he know that daffodils were my favorite flower? It had only been a week since we started dating, but I felt like I already knew him perfectly. He obviously knew me well enough to get a bouquet of my favorite flowers.

I let myself slip into dreaming again. We raced each other up the stairs of the tall tower. Once we got to the top, he caught me and held me in a tight embrace. I was out of breath from laughing so hard. "I told you that Mr. Yancy wouldn't see us sneak through his garden. And you were worried!" My laughing stopped when I saw his face. He looked older than he should have. His jaw line was set in a serious way; like he was about to tell me something he didn't want to. "I just got a call, Grace. It doesn't look good. The doctors say he has two months to live." He broke down crying and I wrapped my arms around him. No longer was there any tower or sixteen-year-old boy standing in front of me. There he was, twenty-three, but sobbing like a child.

I focused on the flowers again. They seemed more wilted, but they still looked happy, nestled in that blue vase I loved. Blue has always been my favorite color. It was the color of the curtains that hung in the living room of our old house. They stretched from ceiling to floor with small white designs sewn across. Those little ballet slippers sat right underneath them. Another month and they would be too small for Lily if she kept growing at the rate she was now. James had taken her to buy a pumpkin from the pumpkin patch down the road. That was the day she fainted, and the day Jeremiah came running in to tell me. It was the same disease that took James' father.

This time it looked like a daffodil was missing. Didn't there used to be five? A small picture frame showed a boy with shaggy red hair, his arm around a beautiful, short, blond girl. Jeremiah was so nervous when he asked Macy to the prom. Probably just as nervous when he saw her walk down the aisle. They were so happy; well, they seemed happy, until she left with the baby.



Someone knocked on the door. She handed me two white pills. Oh, good, I thought, maybe she can make this headache go away. My leg still felt like it was asleep. I tried to tell her that I saw a crack in my favorite vase, but I was too tired to talk.

I let my eyes shut again to dream some more. We are back at the tower. James is pointing to the old man in the fishing boat, telling me some story about how he would love to sail away on a boat and never come back to this town again. I laugh at him and tell him that isn't going to happen, since we have a test in Algebra the next day. He sticks his lip out and pouts, then tells me to dare him to jump off that cliff hanging over the lake.

The lady came in again, this time with food. I sat up, managing to stay awake this time. The headache was bothering me less. I kept my eyes open and noticed what was around me. The room looked strange, with white walls and tile floors. A bed was pushed against the opposite wall near the window. I wondered who my roommate was. His face was shriveled up, and the skin under his eyes sunk down, weathered by many years. I looked at him again. Above his bed, I noticed a sign with my boyfriend's name written on it. That's funny, I thought.

I looked at the woman trying to get me to eat. "Who's the old man in James' bed?" I asked. She didn't answer me. Instead, she picked up the vase of dead flowers and walked out of the room.

