

The Fall of Daphne Daisy, 6-8, p.1

I was sixteen when I first met Daphne. She was –and still is – the weirdest girl I’ve ever known. At fifteen, I was a follower – I’m not afraid to admit it. I just moved to California from safe little Maine, and I was a *wussie*. My opinions and desires were sheathed by my crippling shyness. If someone – just *anyone* – could stand up for what I believed in, I would follow in their footsteps. I’m like the Michael Collins to the Neil Armstrong – and that’s what Daphne and I had.

Her whole *look* was the epitome of the 70s. She wouldn’t be caught dead without a tie-dye blouse or flowers in her hair. She prowled the hallways on her black heelies, ignoring authorities when ordered to take them out and ‘walk around like a normal girl’. Her straw blonde hair was cropped an inch or so under her chin, and she always had something weird in it–chopsticks in it to hold it up, flowers braided into it, or streaks of pink and blue from where she rubbed it against highlighters in soft *shicks*. Her expressive eyes were an impossibly dark blue, and they could love you, or they could scare anyone into submission.

When I first met her, it was the first day of our junior year, in sixth period Algebra. In a comfy spot of the front– right corner, I took out my notebook, trying to ignore curious glances. Yes, I’m the new girl – get over it. Our teacher shuffled in, sighed, and sat at his desk in front of me with a smile that didn’t look very genuine. The room filled with the familiar buzz of chattering as the teacher organized his sheets, just as the door bust open.

“Hey,” she said, a cocky smile spreading on her lips. She looked around the class. “So...math?” She rolled down to where the teacher was.

“Had trouble finding your class?” he asked darkly. She leaned against his desk, almost sitting on it. She was directly in front of me, and she smiled down at me.

“Oh, no. But I had trouble finding the will to arrive.” She winked at me as some chuckles erupted from the class, and a couple of ‘That’s Daphne for ya!’s. Her eyes drifted around the room, taking in the various posters on the walls. The dark orbs settled on a poster above the door. I followed her gaze.

LADIES, IF YOU CAN'T DO NUMBERS...
YOU BETTER LEARN HOW TO COOK.

Underneath it was a classic 50s portrayal of a blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman baking a pie.

She stood up slowly, and the tension radiated off of her was palpable. I gulped.

“*Excuse me?*” she slowly turned to face the teacher, and only the most oblivious of students were still chattering in the background. “What *is* this? What *is* this – this *bull?*” The teacher’s face darkened, and his spongy cheeks were reddening.

“Miss Daisy, I heard a lot about you, and you *cannot* –”

“Shut up! What the hell! Do I even have to go over how *rude* and *awful* and *demeaning* that is?!” I was so awed. This girl was breathtaking. In a flash, she pushed the contents of the teacher’s desk in one fatal swoop, and on the floor laid a broken mug, an assortment of papers, and a cracked “#1 teacher” plaque.

“*MISS* –”

“No! Don’t even speak to me! You are the equivalent of the *scum* of my feet!” she stood at no more than 5’7, but when she was screaming like that, she could bring any Goliath to her level. She turned to the class for the first time. “If you people have *any* shred of *human sympathy*, you’ll follow me! If not, stay here and *broil* in your own *ignorance!*” she half-stomped, half-heelied out of the classroom. The slam of the door was the exclamation mark to her argument.

No one stirred. Except for – me. I rose to my feet silently; hiding behind a curtain of my hair, I gathered my books, pausing in front of the teacher, who was frozen in a state of perpetual anger. I stepped on the broken handle of the mug with a satisfying *crunch*. He eyed me, a sliver of ‘don’t-you-dare’ in his beady eyes. *This will backfire*, I thought. I hesitated, but went on my way ripping the poster of the wall. Just before I closed the door, I heard him say –

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“If anyone else wants to leave, then don’t bother coming back.” I bit my lip softly.

Craning my neck to see around the corner, I could see Daphne waiting stiffly at the end of the hall. She eyed me up, and her face so different from before- so solemn. It was if every feature was turned into the flaming scowl of a triggered feminist.

“Are you the only one?” she said when I caught up with her.

“Yeah... And I brought this.” I lifted up the offender, and it trembled in small *warbles*. “I propose we burn it.” She grinned mischievously.

“Let’s!” She said, before producing a pink lighter out of her blouse.

“What – *now? Really?* ”

“Yeah, man! There’s a place in the boy’s bathroom on the fifth floor where the fire alarm doesn’t work.” She bounded up and down in her shoes. Her polar change from dead-serious to vivacious was astonishing. “C’mon!” she grabbed me the wrist and already was pulling me up to the staircase. She didn’t even let me answer, but we were already on our way.

Two flights of stairs and a babble of Daphne’s ranting later, we were in front of a flooded urinal in the bathroom, and it finally occurred to her to ask for my name.

“Catherine Bean. Catherine with a ‘C’,” I added.

“*Bean? Catherine Bean?*”

I nodded.

“Well, Catherine-with-a-C Bean, that is just about the *cutest* name I have ever heard.” She chuckled as she ripped the poster out of its protective covering and dumped it into the flooded urinal.

She clenched the lighter in between her teeth as she slipped her back-pack over to her front.

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“Here-” she grunted around the lighter – “rubbing alcohol.” It was at this point that I grew apprehensive.

“Daphne, I agree that this poster is highly sexist and offensive, but I don’t know if I’m ready to be convicted of arson over it.” Daphne already poured at least half of the alcohol into the bowl, and she was struggling to ignite the lighter.

“Don’t worry. The fire alarm won’t go off- it can’t. My brother is the one who disabled it, and I’ve done this plenty of times.” I bit my lip. I stared into the clear pool in the urinal, and I could see the scorch marks where past students had doused cigarettes or burned failed tests. Was I really ready to do something like this on my first day of school? “Oh, whatever. The freakin’ thing won’t light.” Daphne answered my question for me. She sighed. “We’ll have to be content with ripping it up and flushing it down the toilet. And I used up so much of the bottle...” she shoved it back into her back-pack.

“Whatever – same effect, right?” I said, hiding my relief.

“Yeah, to some extent.” She started tugging at the corners of the horrendously orange poster, and I helped her rip it into a dozen pieces. It was thicker than I expected, so we only flushed a couple at a time, in fear of flooding the toilet. The poster was reduced to soggy pieces of orange mush, floating around in the Californian sewer system.

The whole time, I couldn’t help but wonder how she got this way, and if I could one day be like her too.

But, her fire began, subtly, to retract, and I was left with Buzz Aldrin, where Neil used to stand.

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The first strike was too subtle for anyone to notice. It fell undetected by our radars, but it was really a Major Changing Point in Fate – where the future that was supposed to be hers was altered drastically by a new factor in her life. And the new factor, the game-changer, the defining component, was called Cress Watterson.

Short dreadlocks framed his face, and chocolate brown eyes bore into hers through the metal of her open locker door. She shut it, and he grinned, snaking a large hand into Daphne's.

“Hey,” he said. “This Thursday sound good?” she grinned like a little girl, and her cheeks reddened.

“Yeah,” she murmured. I was waiting by her locker, and I was about to tell her something- of what, I can't remember- when she pulled away and left with Cress. I felt forgotten.

After being omitted from the majority of Daphne's schedule, with the excuse: “*I already have plans with Cress,*” we drifted away, our bonding time limited to once every week. I shrugged it off. Daphne introduced me to new friends, more people like her, except these people wanted to stay. Noah Bellegarde, Angela Cho, Ruth Whiteberg, Dennis Mitchell. The list went on. They were all still with me.

One night, Daphne made a rare phone call. She actually talked to me for 20-straight minutes, a new record. I was ecstatic; until it turned out that she just wanted to talk about you-know-who.

“He's beautiful,” she sighed, instead of the customary ‘hello’.

“Who?” I said, as if I didn't know.

“Cress Watterson,” she breathed.

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“He sounds like a salad,” I pouted as I painted my toenails mauve.

“He’s great,” she simply replied.

At one point, I put the phone down for a full three minutes as I stumbled around my room, trying to find the nail polish topcoat. When I picked it back up, she was still talking, unaware of my discreet rudeness. I frowned. I missed the times when she talked this way about Taking a Stand.

It was March 19th, my birthday. She showed up two hours late to my birthday party, arm linked to Cress as if he was her lifeboat. She was adrift in her ignorance.

“Here,” she said, smiling, as if she didn’t show up for the last half-hour of her best friend’s seventeenth birthday. “I got you something,” I took it, feigning a delighted smile, and opened it. It was a \$50 iTunes gift card. I hugged her, and thanked her.

Later, after she left, I cried in Noah’s arms, remembering when we ranted about Apple’s corruptness. She forgot.

It took me another few weeks to realize I no longer needed to be tethered to Daphne as if she were my raft. In a sea of my extreme timidness, I was now the captain. Whether I realized it or not, I was now outgrown of my need for her. But it didn’t stop me from missing her.

I was almost asleep when my phone rang, piercing the silence.

“H’llo?” I mumbled, shaking sleep away.

“Bean?” she cried, her voice hoarse.

“Daphne? Are you okay?” she sounded raw, like she’s been crying. And she hasn’t called me Bean in forever. She tried to speak but her sobbing just overlapped all of the words she was trying to say.

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“Daphne, just let it out, and then tell me.” She cried and cried, and every snivel made my heart break. But it didn’t compare to what she finally said.

“*He hit me,*” she choked out.

And then the line went dead.

When it was summer break and we haven’t talked in weeks, though she promised to call, I cried in Noah’s lap. He patted my back as my silent, hot tears rolled down my cheeks one after the other.

I just didn’t get it. I’ve lost touch with friends before, countless times. I lost all the friends I made in Maine when I moved here, but they just detached painlessly. Why was Daphne so hard to let go?

“I think I know why,” I whispered, sitting up and brushing away the hairs that stuck to my face.

“Why what?” he said. Liquid-gold eyes gazed into mine.

“Why it’s so hard to let go.”

“I’m listening.”

“Remember when she tried to heelie down the stairs, and she broke her ankle?” I grinned, and so did he. “Or when she beat up the guy who touched Angela’s butt? And when she got kicked out of AP English for showing up with a fake sword, and battled people who had pens to show that the sword *was* mightier than the pen?” we laughed, and we reminisced until we were out of memories, so we just sat in the thick nostalgia, which threatened to suffocate us in its supreme thickness.

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First day of senior year was the last straw. I walked in bashfully, hand-in-hand with Noah. I let go reluctantly, since his locker was much farther than mine. I strode down the hall, greeting all of my old classmates, when I saw her. Her hair was much longer than before, and it was in a high ponytail. She wore a floral-printed sundress and white flats on her feet. It was the first time I saw her in new clothes, in a style other than a 70s hippy. Cress stood next to her, grinning ear-to-ear, and it was obvious he was showing her off. I shrugged the thought of her summer break transformation, and headed to my locker. *I'm over her, I'm over her*, I repeated as a mantra.

Unfortunately, my locker was next to where she was standing with Cress. Dammit. I gritted my teeth and opened it, trying to memorize my combo when it happened. The Final Straw. I was so occupied with my locker duties that I didn't hear the sophomore sneak up on me. I jumped when he slapped my rear-end with enough force to bruise. I looked back to see the jerk scrambling away, his cronies tagging back and hooting at me. My face flushed red with pain and embarrassment and tears threatened to spill. But the worst part?

He was laughing. Cress Watterson. His dark chuckle was soon accompanied by another laugh, a shrill giggle.

I didn't recognize it as Daphne's mannish chuckle at first, but when I turned back, I saw her bright nails hiding her perfectly sculpted lips in mid-laugh. I crumpled inside.

Daphne Daisy died.