



The Language of Flowers

By Vanessa Diffenbaugh

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Genre and Subject

Florists fiction

Contemporary romance

Synopsis

The Victorian language of flowers was used to convey romantic expressions: honeysuckle for devotion, asters for patience, and red roses for love. But for Victoria Jones, it's been more useful in communicating mistrust and solitude. After a childhood spent in the foster-care system, she is unable to get close to anybody, and her only connection to the world is through flowers and their meanings. Now eighteen and emancipated from the system with nowhere to go, Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But an unexpected encounter with a mysterious stranger has her questioning what's been missing in her life. And when she's forced to confront a painful secret from her past, she must decide whether it's worth risking everything for a second chance at happiness.

Author Biography

VANESSA DIFFENBAUGH was born in San Francisco and raised in Chico, California. After graduating from Stanford University, she worked in the non-profit sector, teaching art and technology to youth in low-income communities. Following the success of her debut novel, *The Language of Flowers*, she co-founded Camellia Network (now Lifeset Network), a non-profit whose mission is to connect every youth aging out of foster care to the critical resources, opportunities, and support they need to thrive in adulthood. She currently lives in Monterey, CA, with her husband and four children.

Discussion Starters

1. What potential do Elizabeth, Renata, and Grant see in Victoria that she has a hard time seeing in herself?
2. While Victoria has been hungry and malnourished often in her life, food ends up meaning more than just nourishment to her. Why?
3. Victoria and Elizabeth both struggle with the idea of being part of a family. What does it mean to you to be part of a family? What defines family?
4. Why do you think Elizabeth waits so long before trying to patch things up with her long-lost sister Catherine? What is the impetus for her to do so?
5. The first week after her daughter's birth goes surprisingly well for Victoria. What is it that makes Victoria feel unable to care for her child after the week ends? And what is it that allows her to ultimately rejoin her family?
6. One of the major themes in *The Language of Flowers* is forgiveness and second chances – do you think Victoria deserves one after the things she did (both as a child and as an adult)? What about Catherine? And Elizabeth?
7. What did you think of the structure of the book – the alternating chapters of past and present? In what ways did the two storylines parallel each other, and how did they diverge?
8. The novel touches on many different themes (love, family, forgiveness, second chances). Which do you think is the most important? And what did you think was ultimately the lesson?
9. At the end of the novel, Victoria learns that moss grows without roots. What does this mean, and why is it such a revelation for her?
10. Based on your reading of the novel, what are your impressions of the foster care system in America? What could be improved?
11. Knowing what you now know about the language of the flowers, to whom would you send a bouquet and what would you want it to say?

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