



WHEN THE PAST REPEATS ITSELF,  
CAN THERE BE A DIFFERENT OUTCOME?

# *Daffodils*

*Donna B. Snow*

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by

Donna B. Snow

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## **DAFFODILS**

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## Dedication

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# 1

The doorbell echoing through the house was the last straw...as if the pounding hadn't been enough.

"I'm coming already," Margaret Ellington snarled. Whoever was banging deserved whatever came out of her mouth. Pushing hair out of her eyes, she snapped the lock and yanked the door open.

Margaret's face froze. *Oh, Lord, help me.*

Sky blue eyes stared back at her—Lukas North.

His lopsided grin would have suited a ten-year-old boy after getting away with some mischievous prank. Eyebrows raised, he lifted a cup of coffee from the crook of his elbow and held it towards her. Pink lettering on the cup showed the logo from the coffee shop around the corner. The bright morning sun set red-gold highlights aglitter in his hair while his eyes crinkled at the corners. A dimple dipped into his cheek.

Margaret forced her gaze back up to his. "What are you doing here?" She groaned at her own rudeness, a moment later remembering his pounding on the door. He always had brought out the best—and the worst in her. She pushed the screen open as he continued to hold the cup towards her. Fingertip to fingertip, Margaret felt the tingle shoot up her arm. She took the coffee and let the screen door slap closed between them as she gripped the door frame.

Not Lukas. Never again. Ten years...*Lord, help me. I can't deal with him today. Leaving is hard enough. Please, Lord, give me strength.* She shivered then glanced up and down the street, refusing to meet his gaze. Lukas had always seen too much—as if he could see straight into her soul.

Margaret lowered her head and sighed. A peek at her watch and she looked down the street again, hoping for a savior in the form of a moving van. They should be here in about fifteen minutes.

She stared at a van parked on the street. Why is he here? Why isn't he saying anything? Silently, she raised the coffee towards her mouth and a waft of steam touched her lips. She lowered it without taking a sip.

The vehicles in the driveway distracted her from Lukas as a third pickup pulled in. The door of the red van parked out front opened. She looked from one vehicle to the other trying to see who was in them. *What are these trucks doing in my yard?*

Jamestown, California was still a small town where everyone knew everyone, at least the faces that belonged, even some that passed through, often on their way to Sonora. And the people gathering in her yard belonged here. They had been friends with her and Peter for years. But they all said goodbye at the party last night.

She turned back to Lukas. He stood patiently watching, waiting...

Before she could ask, he waved a hand towards the driveway. "Your caravan awaits."

Margaret's brow furrowed. "The moving van should be here soon. I told you yesterday that I was all set."

He took a sip of his coffee and glanced over his shoulder. "What? You don't think we have enough help here?" He turned back towards Margaret, his blue eyes frowning at her.

She glanced away, her fingers digging into the foam cup. "I don't want to put anyone out. It would just be easier..."

"Easier for you, maybe, but we'd like to help. A lot of us will miss you and we want the chance to show you how we feel." He held her gaze, his voice soft spoken.

Margaret stared into his eyes, mesmerized by what she thought she saw there. Heat—a slow burn, a smoldering fire. He couldn't possibly still...She shook herself and looked away. His problem. He's the one who walked away.

*Forgiveness...*

She cleared her throat then looked at her watch again. "Remember the small going away party last night?" She pictured him manning the grill, spatula in hand. That was supposed to be their goodbye. The kiss at the end of the night had been enough of a surprise to keep her tossing and turning for hours. She didn't need any more unexpected surprises like that. "What am I supposed to do? Leave the moving company a note that I'm all set?" Once again, Margaret lifted the cup for a tentative sip.

Lukas raised his brows and grinned.

Oh, that grin. She could feel her lips twitching, wanting to answer in kind.

"Not to worry. I already took care of that."

Margaret narrowed her eyes. "What do you mean, you took care of it? They are still coming, right?"

He shook his head.

*Can't he at least have the decency to look a little bit ashamed?*

"I cancelled them yesterday after I talked with you."

"You what? There's a fee for cancelling. If I'm paying them regardless, you better believe they'll be providing their services." She clenched her fist. Some things just never changed. He always did think he knew what was best. How dare he? She wanted to stomp her foot at his high-handedness—slam the door in his face. Oh, she was tempted. Lucky for him God had made a new woman of her. He was the only one holding back her temper, she was sure.

"I took care of that, too."

She rolled her eyes. "Wonderful. So I guess that makes it all right."

"No, I'm just saving you the expense since it wasn't your doing." His tone was steady, the smile falling flat when his gaze met hers.

He sounded so reasonable. *Just who does he think he is? As if he has any say in my life anymore. You gave up that right a long time ago, buddy.* She shook her head, trying to quiet the argument going on in her mind. She glared at him, tilting her chin. "And what if I want the moving company to come, anyway?"

He quirked a brow and didn't respond.

Margaret sighed and closed her eyes. "Look, I don't want anyone getting hurt moving my stuff. The furniture is heavy and I would really rather the professionals take care of it. And what if something gets broken? I don't want anyone feeling responsible for any damages. The movers have insurance for that kind of thing."

"We've all helped friends move at one time or

another. We know how to lift stuff. No one's going to get hurt and nothing will be broken."

"You can't guarantee that."

"No, but I can guarantee that no one would hold it against you even if they did get hurt. I can also guarantee that no feelings will be hurt by you accepting the help that's offered. No such guarantees on a refusal." His stare bit into her.

Her gaze broke away first. How neatly he boxed her in with his words...and what a shrew she would look like if she sent everyone away—if they would even leave. Plus, it was probably too late to reschedule the movers, and she had to be moved out today. The new owners would be here tomorrow.

"I'm sure they don't want to waste a whole day out of their vacation schedule just to help me move. With Christmas just past and getting themselves ready to head back to school I'm sure they have better things to do."

He stared at her and raised his eyebrows.

Darn the man. She sighed. "Look, the new house is an hour away from here, in Solsta." She glanced at the vehicles in her yard, then back at Lukas. "Let me at least pay for their gas."

Lukas shook his head.

Margaret slapped a hand on her hip. "What difference does it make? I would have been paying the movers."

"Nope. We're all here to help a friend," he answered calmly. He took a sip of his coffee and looked over his shoulder. "Oops, looks like the gang's all here."

A blue car pulled up. Great. The principal and first grade teacher. They stepped out and waved, smiling as

they started up the walkway.

Lukas rubbed the back of his neck and grinned.

"Hi." Her smile quivered as they approached. She lifted a hand to brush the hair away from her eyes again. "Thank you so much. I really didn't want to put anyone out, especially just after Christmas like this."

"And Peter, God rest his soul, would have skinned me alive if he knew I didn't help you with your move." The principal came halfway up the walkway and crossed his arms over his chest, planting his feet apart. "Matter of fact, he would never forgive me for letting you go to begin with."

He was right. Peter, her husband, would have told her, in no uncertain terms, that these people cared about her and that she should let them help. They were her friends.

As a matter of fact, if Peter were the one speaking, he would tell her she couldn't run away from it all, that she would carry it with her no matter where she went. He would also have told her that God had a plan and that she ought to pray to understand what His will was in all this.

*Oh, Lord, I know that, but Peter's gone home to be with You. I have to go. I can't stay here. After two years of stumbling around and mourning her half-hearted attempt at marriage, she couldn't live with the grief or the guilt anymore. She knew God had forgiven her, but she didn't deserve it.*

*I'm so sorry, Peter, sorry I wasn't the wife I should have been...sorry I didn't love you as much as I should have...sorry I never gave you the child you so desperately wanted.*

Margaret took a deep breath, blinking her eyes until the watery vision cleared. Worrying her bottom

lip, she looked from one face to another, then cleared her throat and sniffed. "Well, I guess since you're here, and the movers aren't coming..." She looked pointedly at Lukas. "...I'll have to put you all to work." She pushed the screen door open. "Come on in. We might as well get started."

Lukas held the door and stepped in last. He stood beside her and looked around. "No stray Christmas decorations that you might have missed?"

Margaret turned away and stepped towards the kitchen. "I didn't put any up this year." Or last year...

She looked around at everyone. They seemed to know just where to start, so Margaret continued into the kitchen. Lukas glanced at the boxes and nodded towards them. "Why don't you finish what you were doing? We'll load the furniture and by the time we're done you'll have those ready to go. Is that the last of it to be packed up?"

Margaret nodded, and then watched everyone find their place with well-choreographed steps, each person going where they were needed. Jokes and laughter filled the house as they loaded her life into their trucks.

Margaret wandered back to the kitchen to pack the pan she used for breakfast this morning, plus the few other items still in the cupboards. A half hour later, after checking all the cabinets and drawers one last time, she taped the final box closed and lifted her head in time to see a lamp sliding towards the floor.

"Whoa, easy there," Lukas said from the doorway, his gaze colliding with Margaret's. He turned back to the job at hand. "Nice save."

She released her breath and looked away, brushed off her jeans and walked down the hall without a

word. Wandering from room to room, she double-checked everything. Closets were empty, no boxes forgotten. The shadows on the walls outlined stark reminders of where pictures had been. The unfinished projects—a cracked floorboard, chipped molding, a small hole in the plaster, all stared at her accusingly.

Margaret closed her eyes as she clutched the doorframe. *Oh, God, why Peter? He was the good one.*

*I'm so sorry, Peter.* A tear splashed onto the carpet. Margaret took a deep breath, wiped her cheek, and stepped into what had been Peter's sickroom. She walked to the window seat and stared out into the backyard, arms clutched around her middle. There would be no sound of children playing, no sitting on the glider growing old together. She put a hand on the window. *If only I could have loved you more—*

"Any more, Megs?" Lukas' footsteps grew louder as he came down the hall.

She wiped away another tear as it dribbled down her cheek.

"Oh, hey, there you are." He hesitated in the doorway, resting a hand on the frame. He lowered his voice. "You OK?"

She chewed on her bottom lip and nodded, afraid that if he came near her she would collapse in those arms; arms she knew were strong enough to hold her up. Arms she had missed for years. She hated herself for wanting to feel them wrap around her again.

A glimmer of a smile creased his lips, as if sharing her pain. She remembered other smiles, other glances across different rooms. She sighed and looked back outside.

After ten years, the memory of Lukas disappearing from her life still haunted her. She had

worn his engagement ring through the last half of their senior year. Then a month before their wedding day, he left. No goodbye, just a letter—as if that was enough. Then poof. He was gone.

She gave the ring to her mother and never saw it again.

The pain of lost love still lingered. It was best left in the past, but she had never figured out how to let it go. God knew she tried.

The contradiction tore at her heart. Losing Lukas hurt worse than anything else in her life, but the love never died. If only she could have loved Peter with that same fervor, instead of the half-hearted love she had given him. Oh, she had tried, but it wasn't the same.

Margaret took a deep breath. Her gaze lingered on the backyard for a long moment. Straightening her shoulders, she led the way down the hall, stepping silently past Lukas.

## 2

Lukas watched Margaret move around him...his Megs. He wanted nothing more than to hold her, to wrap her in his arms and cry with her for all she had lost, for all they had lost. She looked brittle, like fine crystal that might shatter with too much pressure. *Dear Lord, give her the strength to get through this. Please take away this burden of grief she carries. It's gone on long enough, Lord. Help me to be the friend I ought to be, and if it's Your will, please heal the pain I caused her so long ago.*

The first day she walked into the school, his gaze drank her in. He wanted to reclaim her, tell her why he left all those years ago, why it would never have worked back then. He had prayed then that he would be given the chance to fix things between them. But there was no changing the past, and the way she avoided him...obviously she hadn't forgiven him. Not that he could blame her. But it was past time to clear the air. He just hoped God felt the same way.

Lukas followed her into the empty living room before he spoke. "Why don't you lead the caravan, since you're the only one who knows the way?" At least he wouldn't have to search for where she moved to—because he wasn't going to let her go again.

"It's easy to get to," she said, her eyes looking away, unfocused.

She glanced around the empty room then back

down the hall. Her sigh seemed to carry the weight of the world.

When Lukas reached for her shoulder, Margaret stepped back and held up a hand. "Don't..." She shook her head and took a shaky breath. "I can't..." She turned and hurried towards the door. "It's time to go."

He watched her scurry out of the house as if there were demons at her heels.

She stood waiting on the step while Lukas pulled the door closed. She moved forward to lock it.

As Margaret swiveled to leave, Lukas wrapped his long fingers around her arm, tugging her towards him. She shook her head again and held out her other hand, but seemed to crumble against him as he drew her into his arms for a hug. Her body quivered.

"Shhh, Megs. It's OK. Everything's going to be OK." He let one hand sweep over her hair and down her back, drawing her closer still. So soft...her hair was shorter than he remembered, but still long enough to run his fingers through. She fit perfectly in his arms...she always had. He leaned his head down and breathed in the sweet scent of flowers in her hair. He could swear she used the same shampoo as when they were in high school. Since the day she walked back into his life, he wanted to hold her this way. *Oh God, please fix this rift between us.*

He felt her take a deep breath and straighten, so he slowly let her slide out of his arms. Their gazes held, and she stepped back.

Margaret turned away, as if embarrassed, then looked back, a shadow of a smile on her face—the strength he remembered shining through. "Thank you." She turned and went down the stairs, stopping to talk with other teachers who waited beside their

vehicles.

Lukas followed slowly.

By the time she started her car, everyone was ready to follow. He said a prayer for safe travel and for no one to be hurt; then he followed last.

\*\*\*\*

Margaret exited off the highway and drove a few blocks before taking a right into the quiet neighborhood of single family homes. The line of vehicles trailed behind her like baby chicks following a hen.

A few minutes later, she turned into her driveway, the house as nondescript as all the rest along the street. She stared at it for a moment wondering if it would ever look like home. Not that she really deserved that.

As soon as the first truck parked, the unloading began. No tours were necessary. The house was small. It was all she needed.

The front door led into the living room, the kitchen straight ahead. Only the bedrooms weren't visible, but they were just off the end of the short hallway to the left. She pointed out which one would be her office. The rest was obvious.

Three hours later, Margaret carried the last box from her car to the kitchen. She glanced around. The kitchen table was empty, the whole room, the whole house, antiseptic. The table needed place mats and flowers, a centerpiece of some sort. In the living room, the couch, a forlorn sentinel, sat between the two end tables, empty but for the lamps. The TV on the opposite wall stared back blankly. The walls were bare. It was just a house, a shell. She closed her eyes and

breathed deep, bringing a fist to her mouth as she fought back more tears. She didn't want to spend the rest of her life alone, but she couldn't bear the thought of not being able to give her whole heart to someone again. *God help me, please.*

She took a deep breath and stepped outside. Locking the door, she turned to face these friends she had tried to leave behind. "Pizza anyone?" It was the least she could do. Other than unpacking boxes, the house was in order. Everything was in its place. Lukas even hooked up the TV and computer. She just had to settle in...and she wasn't ready to be alone just yet.

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They stepped inside the pizza shop. The yeasty smell of warm dough, mingled with tomato, garlic, and spices had her mouth watering. Margaret followed the others and found herself seated in a booth next to Lukas.

Throughout the unloading, she managed to keep her distance, but her luck had run out.

The years dropped away as she watched him lick sauce from his lips and wash down his pizza with a swig of soda, his Adam's apple bobbing as he swallowed. The past ten years might never have been.

He grinned when he caught her staring and nodded at her plate. "You gonna eat that one?"

She pushed it towards him and he lifted the piece of pizza from her plate.

He raised his eyebrows and waved it in the air. "Sure?"

Margaret shook her head and chuckled. "Some things never change." Their eyes met and she went

back in time. Her heartbeat stuttered and the warmth of a blush crept up her cheeks. Light touches and soft pizza-flavored kisses flooded her memory. It was a few moments before she could breathe again.

"Some things aren't meant to," he said softly, as if they had shared the memory. He took a large bite and Margaret looked away, afraid he might see the longing and pain she couldn't hide.

She pretended not to hear his response. Hands clutched in her lap, she smiled at the jokes swirling around her, her cheeks frozen in a perpetual smile that might crack at any moment.

After dinner, everyone headed for their vehicles while Margaret smiled and waved her thanks. Once again, Lukas stood at her side, his shoulder brushing against hers as he smiled and waved alongside her, as if they had both moved.

She took a deep breath and turned to him, studying his face as the last of the vehicles pulled out onto the street. Soft brown hair fell into his eyes, reminding her of the boy she once loved. She fisted her hand to keep from brushing it back for him like she had done so many times in the past.

Returning her look, Lukas took both her hands in his strong ones, smoothing her fist. He lifted a knuckle to her cheekbone, the gesture melting a small piece of her heart.

She had to remind herself his sympathy was ten years too late.

"I wish I could change the past, that things could have been different a long time ago."

Margaret looked down at their hands and folded her fingers over his. She couldn't deal with that discussion now...maybe ever. "We can't change

history. Ten years ago you made your choices." She shrugged, holding herself stiff, her voice flat. "Let's not dredge it up now. We were just kids." She couldn't go there. She would shatter if the wrong words were spoken. *Dear Lord, give me strength. You promised not to give me more than I can handle, Lord. Well, I'm nearly there. Please...* She turned away, blinking back tears.

As much as she would like to know why he made the choice he did, she knew now was not the time to find out. Better to just let go, not that she'd had much luck with that—even while she was married to Peter.

When she took her first teaching position, running into Lukas was the last thing she expected. Her mother never told her he had moved back. Just seeing him tore away the shield she had painstakingly built around her heart. Avoiding him was the only option. Just the sight of him brought it all back, made her heart ache. He made overtures to see her, to talk with her, but he didn't push when she avoided him. She could only thank God for that.

That was when she met Peter—God's gift. Even when he was sick, his faith was strong. Strong enough to show Margaret who to lean on.

So maybe she was hiding, but she was too vulnerable. It hurt too much to face him. Maybe she should have dealt with her lingering feelings when she first came back, but God knew she needed something more than that. She needed to find her way back to Him. It wasn't just Dad and Lukas she lost that fateful summer. They left her, but she left God, blamed Him for leaving her on her own.

Peter's illness had brought them both face to face with God. While Peter remained steadfast and faithful, even as he was dying, Margaret floundered with why