

University of Massachusetts Boston

From the Selected Works of Rebecca Saunders

Spring April, 2010

Daffodil

Rebecca Saunders, *University of Massachusetts Boston*



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/rebecca_saunders/37/

The Daffodil from Nederland: A Spring Play

Rebecca Saunders
Rebecca.saunders@umb.edu
71 Jay Street
Cambridge, MA 02139
802-722-9015
617-868-6030

The Daffodil: A Spring Play

Cast of characters, in order of appearance.

Narrator

Cleo, 8 years old

Nadia, 5 years old

Goose

Daffodil

Waiter

Jonny, father of Cleo and Nadia

Sage, mother of Cleo and Nadia

Narrator: It was the bluest of days in mid-April when Cleo Belber took a notion to walk by the river just to see what she could see. She thought Nadia might like to go, too.

Cleo: This is the kind of day for happenings. I can tell.

Nadia: How can you tell?

Cleo: Because not all of the tulips have bloomed yet. The red ones have bloomed and the yellow and orange ones have bloomed but not the purple ones or the black ones. It's an in-between time. Things happen in in-between times.

Nadia: Ok, let's go.

Narrator: So they started out. After they had walked for, oh, about a half an hour or so and had seen the usual river happenings-- two mallards landing, lots of crews putting their boats in the boathouses along the Charles, all sizes and shapes of runners, joggers, power walkers, and people with baby carriages transporting singletons, twins, triplets, and sets of sixes and eights-- they can across a lone

daffodil, already picked and then abandoned on the path.

Cleo: This is unseemly. Look at this daffodil. Someone picked it and yet here it is, alone, lying face down on this path.

Nadia: It looks tired.

Cleo: See how its edges are all brown and rusty looking. It is past its prime, sure enough, but it shouldn't be left here to be walked on by walkers and run on by runners.

Nadia: Or trod on by . . . trodders?

Cleo: Yes, I think that's true, too. There's life in it yet.

Nadia: Let's take it with us and put it in some water when we get home.

Narrator: So the girls picked it up and took turns cradling it in their arms as they walked. The river made a bend and when they turned, they came across five or six Canada geese eating grass.

Goose approaches, hissing.

Cleo: This goose isn't at all happy to see us. He, she, or it (I can't tell) is hissing with a very sour look on its face. It's like it's saying, "Get out of here right now or you'll be mighty sorry!" Hum . . . there weren't many people at this part of the river and my feet were slowly getting wet. Where are we? The ground is a bit soggy. Is this a marsh? Well, I'm not afraid.

To the goose:

Just who do you think you are? We didn't do anything to you.

Nadia: Cleo! She's making me nervous. She's tall and I'm only five years old. Please don't make her mad at us, Cleo. Let's just keep walking. Let's go that way.

Cleo: All right. But it is sort of interesting to be hissed at by a goose, don't you think? I told you something would happen today. I wonder what exactly . . .

Daffodil: Oh, she's getting ready to lay eggs. In a week or so, you'll probably find nesting birds all over this part of the river.

Cleo and Nadia: What?!

Daffodil: Yes. The goose is trying to distract you from its nest. That's why it is hissing at you.

Cleo: But . . . but . . . but . . .

Nadia . . . you're a daffodil!

Cleo . . . and you're . . . you're . . .

Cleo and Nadia: TALKING!

Daffodil: I'm feeling rather better. Yes. But I would really like some water. If you could just stick me in the river for a few minutes, I'd be good as new.

Nadia: Quick! To the edge of the water!

Cleo: Uh, oh, here comes that goose. It's following us, hissing like a mad thing. Let's head that way. I don't see any geese over there.

Nadia: Let me do it. Let me put her in.

Cleo: Ok. Be gentle. Ease her into the water. [*To the daffodil*] There you go.

Nadia: How's that? Further in?

Daffodil: Ah, lovely! Just a little deeper—there, that's just perfect. Gulp, gulp, gulp. Pardon my manners—I'm sure you understand. How absolutely refreshing. You are the sweetest girls for lifting me from that dreadful dusty path. I really thought I was done for. As it is, I have turned so fearfully brown. I look as though a bug's been at me. Oh, dear, oh, dear. Let's see what we can do about these split ends.

Cleo: Why, look, Nadia, she's changing! She's turning into a bright yellow flower, as fresh and new as tomorrow morning!

Nadia: You're beautiful!

Daffodil: It's part of my job. A young mother picked me for her two-year-old who took a few bites before tossing me out of his stroller. My left side, I'm afraid, will always look a little, well . . . bitten. Ah, just a bit of suffering for the cause of knowledge.

Cleo: Well, thank you for explaining why the goose was so mad at us. I understand now why it was nervous when we walked by.

Daffodil: And I would like to properly thank you for saving me by offering you a special treat. Please call me Dilly. I would like to show you some of the daffodils of the world, starting with the Netherlands.

Cleo and Nadia: Ohhh . . . the Netherlands!

Daffodil: Have you been there?

Cleo and Nadia: Nooo

Daffodil: Well, let's go then. Come. Hold hands. Then with your other hand, grasp me gently and whatever you do, don't let go! Whoosh! We're off!

Cleo and Nadia: Whoosh . . . Whoa!

Daffodil: Here we are at the site of the daffodils that were the first to bloom in 2011. Nothing other than this year's very first daffodils. We're hovering above my first sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles to bloom this year. And we've gone back in time. Can you guess what month it is? Look at the ground.

Nadia: Where are we? Look! There is snow on the ground! But I thought spring had come.

Daffodil: Look at what is growing out of the cultivated patch of ground beside that building. And that one, too. Yes, over there with the park bench and the fountain. See around that old gate over there? It's medieval. Don't forget to hold on tight.

Cleo: Daffodils! Snow! It's winter!

Nadia: How can this be? And look! How beautiful! Green against the snow. And there's some yellow too. And a little bit of white peeking out.

Cleo: We are backwards in time! Nadia! We are younger than we are! Or were. Or . . . I really don't know!

Daffodil: We just left spring for a little while. It is January, 2011, here where we are now. Look down. See how valiant the daffodils are! I've just whisked you off to Amsterdam on the Valeriusplein in the old south part of the city, near the Vondelpark. That really is snow you see on the ground. Yet daffodils rise and poke through the snow. They brighten everyone's heart! They keep the promise of spring even if there is snow on the ground.

Cleo: Oh, my goodness! I'm still only seven! I'm not even eight yet and those daffodils have bloomed in the snow!

Daffodil: We're off to February, to another place in the Netherlands. You can let go of each other's hand now. Let's land in this square and explore. There's very little snow left here. We'll walk down this street, by the canal. Have you ever seen a canal? Now look at the window boxes. What do you see?

Cleo: Daffodils blooming in the window boxes of the tall, tilting buildings alongside

the canals. Daffodils blooming in boxes in windows on house boats docked at the canals. Daffodils are everywhere.

Nadia: Every house has a window box. Look at that skinny house. It's got six stories, and each one has one, two, three . . . four window boxes. Look! And there's a bicycle with a bunch of daffodils in its basket! The Dutch people really love you, don't they?

Daffodil: Oh, yes, they do. Today is February 12 in Middelburg, an old city in The Netherlands. Would you like a cup of tea? Let's stop in this café. The day is warm enough for sitting outside even though it was the middle of February. It's lunch time and many of the town's workers will be having their midday meal in this old café.

Cleo: I'm mighty glad you speak Dutch, Dilly.

Waiter: Goedemiddag. Wilt u iets drinken?

Daffodil: She said, Good afternoon. What would you like to drink? Twee theetjes en twee broodjes kaas alstublieft? Een flesje water. I ordered two teas and two cheese sandwiches. And a bottle of water.

Waiter: Jazeker, mevrouw.

Cleo: What a lovely old café.

Daffodil: We are in the heart of Middelburg.

Waiter brings tea and sandwiches.

Nadia: Oh, tea with bread, butter, and cheese, like grownups! Tastes so good. And Dilly, are you enjoying your water?

Daffodil: I adore water.

Cleo: Dutch sounds like the language spoken in fairytales!

Nadia: It's probably very hard.

Daffodil: Yes. But to be a daffodil in this world, you really must know Dutch.

Nadia: This is sure some happening day.

Daffodil: This, my dears, is only the beginning. [*To the waiter*] Pardon. Mag ik de rekening? Dank u wel. I asked if I could have the bill and said thank you. Look at what my family and friends are doing here in Park't Loo, Voorburg, the Netherlands, March 22. Hold on. And now that spring has officially arrived, we'll join tourists from all over the world to see one of the largest flower gardens in the world.

Cleo and Nadia: Wow! We're off!

Daffodil: So that you can smell the flowers, we'll skim lightly above "Dei Bloemen Route," the Blooming Road, that goes from the village of Aalsmeer to the gorgeous Keukenhof Gardens and the town of Lisse. Here's one of my favorite places for visiting relatives. See the rows upon rows of yellow, white, and yellow and white. Soon there will be rows of tulips for these gardens are world famous for their tulips as well. But that's another story for another day.

Cleo and Nadia: Oohhh

Daffodil: How about a visit to another country? I just bet you'll love Kew Gardens in London. Hang on whoosh . . . Well done! Now take a look. This below us is Kew Gardens. See how daffodils line the path down to the pond. We do love water. Let's stop and chat here for awhile before going on to Cornwall.

Nadia: Cornwall?

Cleo: We're in England.

Daffodil: And then I thought we'd drop by Surrey for a spell with some of my relatives there.

Cleo: Is it still March? So I'm eight now. Interesting. I've caught up with myself.

Daffodil: Yes. And don't worry. I'll have you home before the end of April. Daffodils are due to bloom in Vermont, where Rebecca and Edouard live, by the first weekend in May and of course I have to be there.

Narrator: And so she did. But not before they visited fields and fields of daffodils.

While the Narrator speaks, Cleo, Nadia, and the Daffodil pantomime picnicking or strolling or smelling flowers—whatever they imagine the day bringing.

They snacked by rivers and ponds and frolicked among thousands of daffodils, acres of daffodils—solid yellow, white, yellow with white, touches of orange—trumpet daffodils, small and large-cupped daffodils, triandrus, cyclamineus, and jonquilla daffodils, tazetta, poeticus, and bulbocodium daffodils, not to mention miniature daffodils, collar and papillon daffodils (split corona varieties) for the entire spring. It seemed their friend knew or was related to every daffodil worth knowing and when the next ones were going to bloom. They ended with a trip to Nantucket where there was a daffodil festival going on that very weekend.

The Daffodil once more takes their hands and whooshes them away.

Daffodil: Take hands. Hold on. Whoosh.

Narrator: Well. When Cleo, Nadia, and the daffodil got home, they were a bit tired from the happenings of that day, let me tell you! When they went in, the house was fragrant with dinner smells. Sage and Jonny were cooking pasta with sardines and kale. Cleo and Nadia shouted hello to them . . .

Both: Hello! Hello!

Narrator: . . . and ran immediately to their room to put their daffodil into their prettiest vase.

Cleo: Thank you for today, sweet friend.

Nadia: Are you comfortable?

Daffodil: Yes. Extremely. We had ourselves a day, didn't we?

Both: We sure did.

Narrator: But when they went back downstairs . . .

Jonny: So how was your walk?

Sage: Yes. Did anything interesting happen?

Narrator: Cleo and Nadia looked at each other and smiled. Then they started to giggle. Then they burst out laughing. Then they fell down on the floor, howling with laughter. Unbeknownst to them, in her vase in their bedroom, the daffodil flashed bright yellow.

End of play.