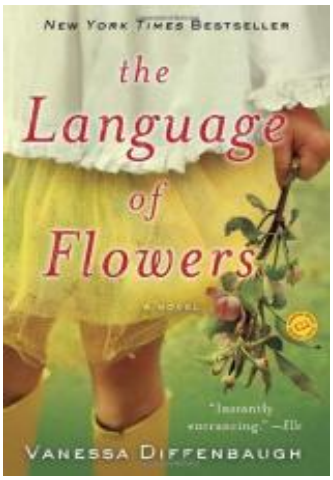
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The Language of Flowers

by Vanessa Diffenbaugh



About the Book

A mesmerizing, moving, and elegantly written debut novel, **The Language of Flowers** beautifully weaves past and present, creating a vivid portrait of an unforgettable woman whose gift for flowers helps her change the lives of others even as she struggles to overcome her own troubled past.

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 grief, 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, Victoria has nowhere to go and sleeps in a public park, where she plants a small garden of her own. Soon a local florist discovers her talents, and Victoria realizes she has a gift for helping others through the flowers she chooses for them. But a mysterious vendor at the flower market 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.

Discussion Guide

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?

Author Bio

Vanessa Diffenbaugh was born in San Francisco and raised in Chico, California. After graduating from Stanford University, sheworked 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, 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.

Photo Credit: Randy Tunnell Photography

Critical Praise

?Fans of Janet Fitch?s WHITE OLEANDER will enjoy this solid and well-written debut, which is also certain to be a hit with book clubs.?

--- *Library Journal* (starred review)

?A deftly powerful story of finding your way home, even after you?ve burned every bridge behind you.THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS took my heart apart, chapter by chapter, then reassembled the broken pieces in better working condition --- I loved this book.?

--- Jamie Ford, author of HOTEL ON THE CORNER OF BITTER AND SWEET

?This heartbreaking debut novel about mothers and daughters, love, and the secret significance of flowers had me weeping with emotion and wonder. Victoria Jones is an unforgettable heroine and you will never look at flowers the same way again.?

--- Tatiana de Rosnay, author of SARAH?S KEY

?Vanessa Diffenbaugh has given us a deeply human character to root for, and a heart-wrenching story with insight and compassion to spare. As a foster-care survivor, I feel a kinship with Victoria Jones as she battles loss and risk and her own thorny demons to find redemption.?

--- Paula McLain, author of THE PARIS WIFE

?Is it really possible that this is Vanessa Diffenbaugh?s first novel? I can hardly believe a debut writer can bring this much insight and polish to a story. What an achievement!?

--- Kelly Corrigan, author of THE MIDDLE PLACE

?THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS gives us new definitions of human compassion in all its forms. Bouquets of laurel and trumpet vine await this beautifully arranged story!?

--- Helen Simonson, author ofMAJOR PETTIGREW?S LAST STAND

?THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS is a primer for the language of love. Vanessa Diffenbaugh deftly gathers themes of maternal love, forgiveness, and redemption into an unforgettable literary bouquet. Book clubs will swoon!?

--- Adriana Trigiani, author of BRAVA, VALENTINE and DON?T SING AT THE TABLE

?This hope-soaked, glorious book speaks to every once-broken, cracked, or poorly mended heart about the risks we take to heal, to be fully human, to truly connect. An astonishingly assured debut.?

--- Joshilyn Jackson, author of GODS IN ALABAMA

?Devastating, hopeful, and beautifully written --- THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS is a testament to the tender mercies and miraculous healing power of love.?

--- Beth Hoffman, author of SAVING CEECEE HONEYCUTT

?Enchanting, ennobling, and powerfully engaging, Diffenbaugh?s artfully accomplished debut novel lends poignant testimony to the multitude of mysteries held in the human heart.?

--- *Booklist* (starred review)

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