

Wild Flower

In a sad little town like Marion it was rare for a girl like Daisy Rae Miller to go unnoticed. When she was a young girl, Daisy had never caused a stir. She had been a quiet, shy child that worked diligently in school and never talked back. It wasn't until the fall of her sophomore year in high school that Daisy Rae became someone to talk about. Daisy had spent the summer with her Grandmother in Raleigh which is about the closest big city to Marion, South Carolina if you don't count South of The Border as a city. Her mother sent her to Raleigh so that she would be free to take the night shift at the Inn where she worked, and make more money while Daisy was away.

“So that we can pay for some higher schoolin', Dais',” Daisy's mother said. Although Daisy believed her mom that this summer would be a summer to gather up some savings, Daisy had a hunch that this money would end up being spent on the booze and cigarettes her mother constantly seemed to be consuming.

Mama Miller was a free spirit, an emotional wreck and a regular substance abuser. Despite her shortcomings, Daisy felt lucky to have a mother that she knew loved her more than anything in the world. The stress of being a single mother was a lot for Mama Miller to handle, and for that Daisy understood her sometimes erratic and unreliable behavior. Daisy couldn't help but love her Mama for everything she was. She thought Grandma had phrased it the best in one of their poolside conversations when she said, “Since she was a girl I could never stop your mama from doing just as she pleased. She has got the demeanor of one of those wild west cowboy shows, but Daisy Rae your mama has a good heart.” This made Daisy smile.

One of the reasons Daisy had always felt lucky was that unlike all the other single moms in town Mama Miller did not let men meddle with her life and with her family. Daisy liked that Mama had never brought strange men home or even spoke about dating or even about the men in town. It had always been the two of them and that was the way Daisy thought it should be. She had gotten chills from tales her neighbor girl, Sandra, would tell about the men her mother brought home on a regular basis. Always reeking of liquor the men would make comments to Sandra, sometimes even advance on her. While Sandra's mother was asleep Sandra would stay awake frightened, with her back pressed against her bedroom door praying that they wouldn't come in like they had so many times before. When Sandra told Daisy these stories, Daisy would feel a burning, twisting knot in her stomach that was proof of her certainty that men were nothing but lying, stinking trash. Daisy didn't trust men, she had never even had a male teacher or friend and she avoided the stores in town she knew had mostly male clerks. There was something about the way they looked at her hungrily and patronizing at the same time that made Daisy uneasy. Daisy loved Mama Miller for keeping men out of their business and every night in her prayers Daisy asked the lord to please keep Sandra's mom from bringing a man into the house that night.

At the end of Daisy's escape, Grandma drove away in her Shiny Volvo and Daisy watched until the car disappeared into the horizon. The sun was beginning to set and Daisy's stomach growled. She already missed Grandma's cooking.

"I am so happy to see my baby sunshine," Mama Miller beamed, "You are just beautiful baby, I am going to have to shoo those boys away this year, better load up the shotgun." Mama Miller chuckled, "Oh you know I'm just kiddin' baby, I have never got

to worry about you runnin' off. You're my good girl." Daisy rolled her eyes at her mother's ranting.

"Don't get ahead of yourself mom," She joked, "All I am worried about right now is gettin' some food in my stomach!"

"Let's go out to eat!" Mama exclaimed. "C'mon baby we will go down to our spot. It's a special occasion, my one and only love is back in town!" Mama smiled one of her childish jolly grins and bounced toward her bedroom. Daisy loved when Mama Miller was in a good mood. "Go get cleaned up and we will be out the door in an hour baby."

Daisy took a cool shower and wrapped herself up in a thin pink towel. The shower was refreshing of course, but Daisy was already missing the shocking caress of submerging into the sparkling water of Grandma's pool. She shook her head to remove the thought, Daisy felt guilty to appear unappreciative or snooty even if it was only in her own head.

"We will be havin' us the usual Betty," Mama smiled as she ordered their supper. They were in their favorite spot, their only spot really, and it was already starting to feel old.

"Alrighty, Ms. Miller!" Before Betty left she turned to Daisy, "I bet you had a wild time this summer! I would sure be livin' it up if I were such a hot young thing in the city," She beamed at Daisy and turned toward the kitchen.

"Oh my," Mama Miller sighed, "don't go listening to bimbos like Betty, Daisy, look where it got her, been workin' in this place since she was fresh out of high school. She had her first baby when she was your age." So many times when mama criticized

people Daisy would want to ask how they were any different from her. Mama Miller often passed harsh judgments.

“Hey mama I think next time I want to try something new,” Daisy said to change the subject. “I think the regular surf n’ turf is gettin’ a little old. Grandma and I ate a lot of salads this summer. I really like salads.”

“Hah,” Mama Miller scoffed. “Daisy take it from **me** surf n’ turf is the best thing on the menu, baby, I’ve been coming here forever.” Mama laughed as though Daisy had asked if she could join the circus or something ridiculous.

“Oh my little Daisy thinks she too good for the surf and turf after eating all those rich people salads with her Grand-mama all summer.” Mama Miller laughed and took a sip of her beer which certainly was not the first she had had that day. Mama Miller’s mood seemed to be plummeting from joyous and sweet to irrational.

It was clear to Daisy that she had struck a nerve with Mama Miller and she regretted she had ever said anything about a stupid salad. There were few things that Daisy had missed about Marion. Mama Miller’s controlling and often manic moods were certainly on the list of things she could do without. After spending the summer with cool tempered Grandma, Daisy realized she would have to do some adjusting to please her mother.

“Hey mama you know I didn’t mean to be rude. I’d much rather be here with you, you know that!” Daisy forced a smile and as she said this she felt her stomach drop because she knew it was a complete lie. She wrapped her fingers around the edges of her chair and closed her eyes, for a moment she thought she caught a whiff of chlorine. She realized this was probably her imagination, but she was comforted still.

At that moment, Daisy's inner peace was broken by the clattering of the plates being set on the table. Daisy snapped back into reality where she was sitting at the table with Mama Miller being served her dinner at their favorite old spot but the waiter who served them was not Betty. His name tag said Tim.

Tim had shaggy, sun kissed blond hair that was in desperate need of a trim and his skin was tanned almost as dark as Daisy's from the summer sun. Daisy noticed the muscles in his forearm flex as he held the heavy plate steady in his hand. She noticed the way his emerald green eyes fixed on her for just a moment too long. He grinned at Mama Miller and Daisy a little too enthusiastically as he slid their plates in front of each of them. Daisy felt the steam and the smell of oven grease wafting into her nostrils. She turned her head down to her plate as if she hadn't noticed Tim's special treatment.

"My name is Tim," He said as he awkwardly pointed to his name tag, "Let me know if I can do anything else for you." This last sentence had clearly been directed at Daisy and she felt her face flush in embarrassment.

"Thank you," said Mama Miller, clearly dismissing Tim from their table side. They ate in silence for a moment or two before Daisy felt obligated to break the tension.

"Mmm, better than I remembered mama," she said through a stuffed mouth.

"Yep," said Mama Miller, taking a swig of her second beer. Daisy dropped her fork onto the plate in frustration.

"Excuse me mama. I need to use the restroom." Daisy stood up and pushed her chair back just a little too quickly.

"Daisy, baby, I'm just tired..." Mama Miller's voice trailed behind her as she headed down the corridor that leads to the ladies room. Daisy knew that there would be

repercussions for storming off like this, but she didn't understand why Mama Miller insisted on ruining the evening. Tears began to well up in Daisy's eyes. She flung open the restroom door and was relieved to find it empty. Daisy took in her reflection in the mirror. This time she saw a girl that had been broken down. Her eyes were red and swollen from holding back tears and her mouth formed a frustrated frown. She put her face in her hands.

"Get it together," she whispered, "Life is like this." Daisy rubbed the tears from her eyes and flashed herself a smile in the mirror. Daisy already felt guilt starting to knot up in her stomach; she knew that she was acting like a drama queen. The world couldn't revolve around her emotions.

Daisy tousled her hair and admired her reflection once more before stepping out of the restroom. As she pushed open the door she heard a crash on the other side. Daisy realized that she had hit someone when she saw two plates of sloppy joe hit the linoleum floor. Daisy jumped back embarrassed and realized it was the new waiter, Tim that she had collided with.

"I am so so sorry," she quickly stuttered. Daisy felt her face flush again and bent over to help pick up the mess.

"No, no, It's not your fault!" Tim quickly shooed her from cleaning up the mess and put his hand on her shoulder. "I have been telling them for months that this was going to happen. I mean who planned to have the kitchen door right across from the restrooms anyway?" Tim smiled, clearly trying to make light of the situation. Daisy felt herself blushing so much that she was sure it was visible even through her sun tanned cheeks.

“Are you alright?” Tim asked with genuine concern on his face. Daisy realized how awkward she was being and she quickly brushed herself off and straightened up.

“Oh I’m fine,” she assured him, “but let me help you with this.” He dropped his hand from her shoulder and they both bent down to clean up the mess.

“Well this is really sweet of you,” Tim chuckled, “I owe you one.” He looked up at her and grinned a grin that made Daisy’s stomach do backflips.

“No it was my fault, I’m sorry,” Daisy repeated. She had no idea what else to say, but she took a deep breath decided she had nothing to lose from being friendly.

“So how long have you been working here? I mean, I don’t think I’ve seen you before and I come here a lot.” Daisy felt herself beginning to ramble, “Well I used to come here a lot before I was gone for the summer, but I’m back now.....” Daisy’s nervous rant trailed off into an awkward silence.

“Oh I just got the job about a month ago,” Tim answered as if her hadn’t noticed Daisy’s nerves. “It’s really not too bad, I get to meet a lot of people.” He smiled up at Daisy as they wiped up the last of the sloppy joe that had been smeared across the ground. “I don’t know that anyone I’ve met would have helped me clean up this mess though.” He really smiled at her now, making Daisy a little uncomfortable. “Thank you, you know I don’t think I know your name.”

“Oh, I’m Daisy Rae” She said, she didn’t know what else to do so she offered him her hand. “Well just Daisy really, only my grandma calls me Daisy Rae.” He chuckled and took her handshake.

“Daisy Rae? I like that. Makes you sound like an old country singer or something.” He released her hand, “I like that a lot.”

“Thank you” Daisy blushed.

“What do you say I make this up to you Daisy Rae? Let **me** buy you a milkshake when I get off in a couple hours.” Tim asked so sweetly It made Daisy melt a little into the floor. But Daisy knew that mama wouldn’t approve of her spending time with Tim, she really didn’t even want to spend time with him. Daisy had never been one of those girls to be seen running around downtown giggling and holding hands with a new boy each week. She had to much pride for that.

“I don’t really like milk shakes” She answered, “but thanks.”

“Okay.” Tim accepted defeat but he looked her in to eyes once more, “I’m getting off at ten...if you change your mind, I’ll be here.” He winked at Daisy and she felt her stomach churn. Usually she would be revolted by this sort of behavior, but there was something so sweet about Tim. She almost believed her really just wanted to buy her a milk shake. “Have a good night Daisy Rae.” Tim smiled once more as he turned back for the kitchen. Daisy loved the way he said her whole name like that.

Daisy suddenly realized that Mama Miller must be waiting at the table furious about the amount of time it was taking Daisy to use the restroom but when she hurried back to the table Mama Miller was no where to be seen. Three dollars were on the table for the tip and only Daisy’s plate remained on the table. Daisy couldn’t believe that her mama had just left her all alone. What had she done? Wasn’t this supposed to be a fun night for the two of them? Daisy did not understand why Mama Miller went to such lengths to make their lives more difficult sometimes. She felt bad, but she also knew that she wasn’t the one that was supposed to be the mother in this relationship.

When Daisy finally reached their home after a long walk through down she heard the music blasting before she even opened the door. Whenever Mama Miller blasted her old country and blues tunes it meant she was drinking. Daisy pushed the door open and braced herself for what was to come. Mama Miller was laying across the couch, bottle in her hand, just as Daisy had expected. Daisy felt a whole new level of anger building up in her chest. Right now they could have been enjoying each other's company, if only Mama Miller could've kept her emotions in check for more than two minutes. Maybe it was the summer away that was making Daisy feel so entitled but at this moment Daisy was sure that she deserved more in her life than a drunk for a mother.

"Dais'?" Mama Miller sat up. "Did you find your way home okay?" She said with a cold tone in her voice.

"Yep. I'm fine, but why'd you leave?" Daisy decided she would give her mama a chance to apologize before she stormed into her room.

"Baby, I didn't leave you I just got sick of all those people, and you left me alone." Mama Miller was clearly drunk. She was always so quick to apologize, and usually even quicker to do it again.

"Alright mama, whatever you say." Daisy didn't want anything to do with this situation at the moment. She took herself straight to her room and tossed herself onto the bed. She lay on her back with her arms and legs spread out like she was floating in grandma's pool. Daisy imagined the lightness she felt as the water held her and she felt the weight of her evening starting to disappear. Daisy smelled the chlorine again and she felt a cool chill wash over her whole body. Daisy loved the rush of that icy water. It was an emotional experience to be surrounded by something that was a treat to your senses. It

was nothing short of delicious, and Daisy could feel her heart breaking to feel so far away from it.

At that moment Daisy flung herself off her bed and looked at the clock. It was already 9:30 so she would have to hurry. Daisy flung open her bedroom door and began to work her way out of the house.

“Where do you think you’re goin’?” Mama Miller asked. Daisy thought for a second about the excuses she could make for needing to leave the house at this hour but she decided that Mama Miller would just have to deal with the truth. Why should she try and please someone who was never satisfied?

“Remember that waiter Tim?” Daisy asked, throwing all previous embarrassment and caution to the wind. “Well he asked if her could buy me a milk shake when he got of work and I said yes.” Daisy couldn’t believe herself. She sounded so bold. Usually an attitude like this would make Daisy think a person was entitled and rude but standing up to her mama took a lot of effort.

“What the hell Daisy? What did you do with my daughter? I don’t want some tramp that runs around town with boys living under my roof! Hell no.” Mama Miller was hysterical. “What have I always told you Daisy? I thought I taught you better than this. What happened to you this summer?” Mama Miller had no shame when she was drunk, calling people names was one of her favorite past times. Daisy was hurt and almost wanted to give in when mama made her feel this way, but she was already gone.

Daisy waited outside of the diner with nerves bubbling in her stomach. She never found herself into these sort of uncertain situations. Somehow putting herself out there was just never something Daisy had felt comfortable doing. As soon as she saw Tim step

through the doors onto the sidewalk she realized how stupid she felt, standing on a dark street corner waiting for some boy to show up. Logically, this move didn't make any sense to Daisy but something kept telling her to keep going.

"Daisy Rae?" Tim looked thrilled. This should have made Daisy feel relieved, but somehow she felt the knots in her stomach twisting even tighter. "I didn't expect to see you standin' out here."

"Well I was just...." Daisy trailed off wishing she could find some of that boldness she had with Mama Miller earlier.

"Coming to get a milk shake with **me** I hope!" Tim chimed in. He never seemed to notice when Daisy didn't know what to say.

"Yeah well I thought it couldn't hurt right." Daisy felt herself relax a little, but she still held her breath.

"Well my truck's right here." Tim walked toward a rusted up red ford. It looked exactly like the kind of vehicle that would be driven by a typical shaggy haired South Carolina boy. Daisy hesitated, but she walked to the passenger side and pulled open the door. As she hopped in Tim laughed to himself.

"What is so funny?" Daisy asked feeling herself relax a little bit.

"I just can't believe a girl like you didn't have big plans on a Friday night." He offered, "I feel pretty darn lucky." Daisy felt herself blush for the one hundredth time today. She didn't see a reason to hide it anymore, blushing was just a sign of feeling.

"Well guess I didn't really feel like sitting at home." Daisy answered. "Honestly, I don't really know why I am letting you take **me** out either." She felt herself relax almost

completely as she laughed at her own comment. Tim laughed too. “I just mean, usually I don’t really do stuff like this.”

“Well I find that pretty hard to believe, you go to school around here right?”

“Yup, Marion Central High.” Daisy sighed.

“Oh okay, I just moved here this summer to live with my mom. My dad went to prison. So looks like Marion is my new home, it’s.....” He trailed off running his fingers through his golden hair.

“Pretty damn terrible.” Daisy finished for him.

“No it’s really not that bad, people are nice, there just ain’t much to do.”

“No really, there is nothing here. I feel so stuck sometimes. I really wish I could just live up in Raleigh with my grandma.” Daisy was surprised at the words coming out of her mouth. She had never said anything quite so honest about how she felt about Marion out loud before. “I am sorry about your dad though,” She added. Daisy hated to seem like she only wanted to talk about herself.

“Oh no, that one has been a long time comin’. It’s better for **me** here.” Tim seemed so genuine when he spoke. He was just so comfortable with himself. “You got a grandma up in Raleigh?”

“Yeah I spent the summer with her. There is so much more there, just better schools and stuff to do and people. It doesn’t hurt that my grandma is so much easier to deal with than my mom.” Daisy still couldn’t believe the ease with which she spoke to Tim.

“What the deal with your mom?” Tim asked, he looked genuinely concerned.

“What isn’t the deal with my mom?” Daisy laughed sarcastically. “I really don’t know how to describe it, just everything really. It’s like nobody can have feelings but her. She hogs all the feelings.”

“I’m sorry Daisy Rae. I can’t imagine what that feels like.” The way Tim said this surprised Daisy. She was so used to being patronized and told that her situation was not as bad as someone else’s. It was so nice to just have someone respect what she had been through. “Why don’t you stay in Raleigh?” Daisy had never really thought about it like that. She had never thought that she could leave Mama Miller and actually live with grandma. That question really made Daisy think hard. What would she really be leaving if she left Marion?

“I don’t know.” It was all she could figure to say.

At that moment the truck pulled into Dairy Queen. On a Friday night in Marion the Dairy Queen was packed with people, mostly kids from Marion Central High. This made Daisy nervous, she had always had plenty of friends in school but she had never been one to hang out with everyone on the weekends. After they hopped out of the truck Tim was quite a gentleman when he ordered and paid for Daisy’s milk shake. They sat and talked about parents, life, and pretty much everything. Daisy felt like she had known Tim for years. He just had a way about him that made her feel like she was smart when she talked and funny when she laughed and pretty when she smiled. Daisy felt so removed from everything that had gone on prior to their evening.

On their way back to the truck Daisy saw something that caught her eye. From the back corner of the parking a girl giggled as she strolled into the Dairy Queen holding the arm of a man that looked older and a little dangerous. The girl was Daisy’s neighbor,

Sandra. It was oddly shocking for Daisy to see Sandra with a boy just because of all the things Daisy knew that Sandra had been through. All those times she had been hurt by a man and now she was hanging on the arm of a man that looked twice her age? Something about this didn't sit right with Daisy. It didn't seem right but it was really just the way things work in Marion. There wasn't much that people could do here but end up just like their mothers and fathers. Daisy felt sick.

Tim drove Daisy back to her house. He had been so sweet and well mannered the whole evening that Daisy had forgotten why she had been nervous in the first place. Being with Tim was like taking a dive into the pool. You went from being lethargic and hot to instantly awakened and at peace. Submerging yourself in something that sweet was like taking an eraser to all of life's problems; everything is swept away.

"Thank you so much Tim. I really needed to get out tonight." Daisy wanted to make sure he knew how grateful she was.

"Anytime, Daisy Rae." Tim smiled and leaned in close to Daisy. At first Daisy was alarmed and a little angry that he would come on to her like that, but all Tim reached in for was a quick hug and then he said "You know I am new to this place but from everything I have seen you're something just something else."

"Well I'm not so sure if that's true, but thank you." As she hopped out of that rusted up truck Daisy felt oddly liberated.

"You looked so upset when you were with your mom at the diner. I really thought you could use a nice night. And Daisy Rae, I think it is about time you get out of here."

Those words rang in Daisy's head as she walked up the walk to her front door. She didn't know if it was possible but she was going to try. Living in a town like Marion

sometimes it was easy to believe that nothing was ever going to change. Daisy Rae knew that there was relief to these sorts of patterns that sustain themselves over generations. This relief could be found in the waves of a pool or in the sweet words of a stranger but mostly this relief was something Daisy had to choose. She never thought she could love something more than she loved Mama Miller, but that didn't mean she could afford to hang on forever. As Daisy stepped through the door into her home she was tempted to clean up her Mama's mess like she always had. Something told Daisy that she wouldn't be doing too much of cleaning up after people anymore. Daisy crawled into her bed and for once felt at peace in her own skin. She may have been in Marion tonight, but really, Daisy Rae was already gone.