

DEBBIE MACOMBER

Must Love Flowers



BOOK CLUB KIT



Author Letter

HEAR YE, HEAR YE!

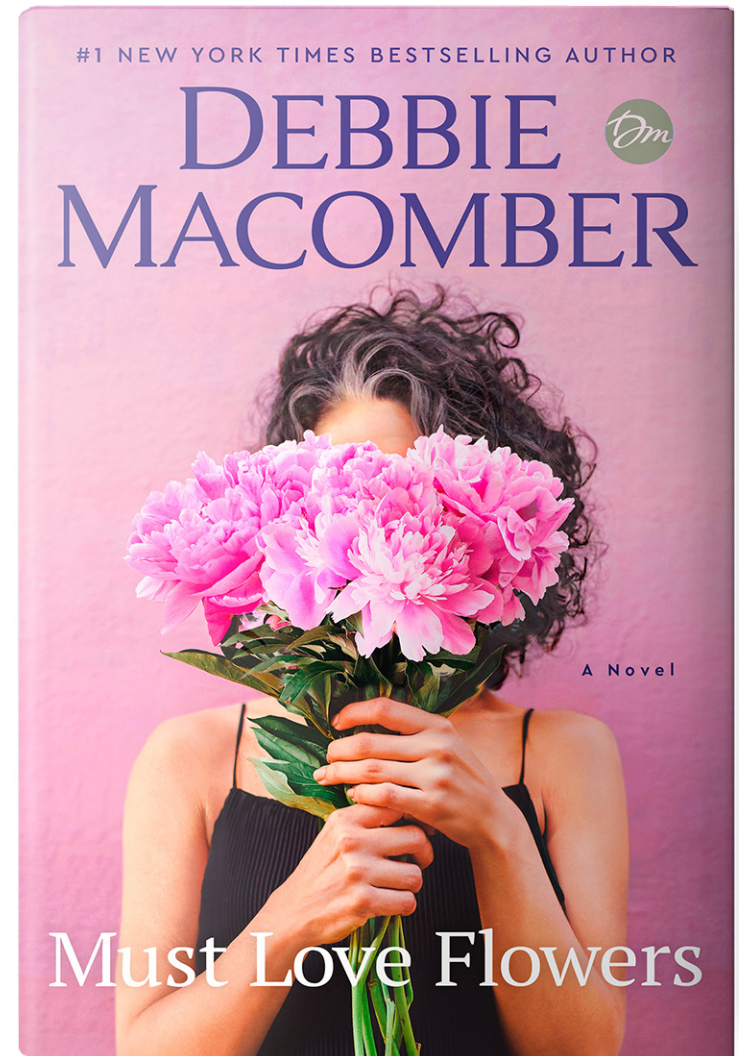
I've always wanted to say that!

Summer is here and my roses are blooming. My gazebo with its flower boxes of bright red Martha Washington geraniums welcomes me as a private getaway. (Think She-Shed!) My mother always kept the front yard of my childhood home the showplace of the neighborhood with an abundance of flowers. I suppose it's only natural that I share her love of plant life.

I'm telling you all this to introduce you to *Must Love Flowers*, my new novel. All of my books have a story behind them, sort of a play within a play. In this case, it was a magazine article about the changes Covid has wrought that inspired the idea. The lingering effects of the pandemic remain with us all in both big and small ways. I decided to write about Joan, a recent widow who, caught up in her grief, shelters in place, and finds it difficult to emerge even after the pandemic ends. That is, until a series of unexpected life events turn her world around: meeting Maggie, a younger woman also in need of a supportive friend, renewing relationships with her children, and a second chance at love.

My readers often tell me they enjoy my stories because they are left with a feeling of hope. I felt that very same emotion as I wrote this story: hope for tomorrow and for all the tomorrows that follow.

DEBBIE MACOMBER



Discussion Questions

1. What are the themes of *Must Love Flowers*? How would you describe this novel to a friend?
2. Joan relies on routines each day. In what ways are routines helpful, as well as harmful? What are the benefits of breaking a routine?
3. Joan with her husband. Maggie with her mother. How do these women process their grief differently? Which character resonated with you most, and why?
4. The pandemic hit soon after Joan's husband Jared passed, adding to the isolation Joan was experiencing. She holed up inside her home like the rest of the world, and continued to stay holed up once things opened again. Did you find the pandemic to be isolating as well? How did it feel once the world began "opening up" again? Did your relationships, and the direction of your life change?
5. How would you describe yourself in the gardening department? If you garden, what's your favorite part of it? If not, why?
6. Maggie's relationship with her father is fraught. How much do we owe family? What should the boundaries be and when does one cross the line? Discuss the tensions between being supportive and being independent.
7. What is your favorite kind of flower and why? Joan "adored the calla lilies that sprang up each spring. . . . the scene of fields of blooming tulips had taken her breath away." If a certain flower brings up a particular memory, please share.
8. How did Joan and Maggie each help the other?
9. Joan takes a major step forward when she attends a grief therapy group. How does engagement with others help relieve suffering? What is the difference between loneliness and being alone?
10. On their first date, Maggie and Joan's son, Nick, attend a trivia night. How would you describe your trivia skills? Pretend you're on Team Beer Today, Gone Tomorrow: What was the title of Bruce Springsteen's memoir? Where was Catherine the Great born?
11. How do you think Joan handled her relationship with her son, Steve?
12. Which scenes stood out to you, and why?
13. At the end of the novel, Phil tells Joan that his heart knew from the moment she said her landscaper must love flowers. "I had no idea if you were young or old, married or single, and yet I knew I was going to fall in love with you." When do you think Joan started to fall in love with Phil?
14. If you could ask the Debbie Macomber anything, what would it be?
15. If the book were being made into a movie and TV series, who would you cast in the roles?

Meet the Characters

JOAN SAMPLE

She has always had a gentle way about her, quick to laugh and quick to encourage others. But after tragedy, will she ever find happiness again?

PHIL HARRISON

A landscape architect who receives a call for a job with one requirement: "must love flowers." He and Joan become friends, and, perhaps, something more.

MAGGIE HERBERT

Kind and hardworking. A tutor at the local elementary school. A nursing student. A barista to help support herself. Something's gotta give.

NICK SAMPLE

Joan's younger son—stubborn, impulsive, but with a good heart. Then he meets someone who just may transform his life.

STEVE SAMPLE

From the outside, Joan's goal-driven, eldest son seems to have it all together, living with his girlfriend out of state. But a mother knows.

EDISON

Joan's new, adorable puppy, named after the great inventor. Though initially resistant to having a dog, Edison is a welcome light in her life.

“[Joan] could only imagine how many calories were in that one slice. However many, it was worth every single one.”

Sour Cream Raisin Pie Recipe

Makes 8 servings

Joan's order at Shari's during her first friendly gathering with the grief-support group.

INGREDIENTS

- 1 cup raisins
- 2/3 cup sugar
- 3 tbsp cornstarch
- 1/8 tsp salt
- 1/8 tsp ground cloves
- 1/2 tsp ground cinnamon
- 1 cup sour cream
- 1/2 cup 2% milk
- 3 large egg yolks, room temperature
- 1/2 cup chopped nuts, optional
- 1 pie shell (9 inches), baked

MERINGUE:

- 3 large egg whites, room temperature
- 1/4 tsp salt
- 6 tbsp sugar

DIRECTIONS

1. In a small saucepan, place raisins and enough water to cover; bring to a boil. Remove from the heat; set aside.
2. In a large saucepan, combine the sugar, cornstarch, salt, cloves, and cinnamon. Stir in sour cream and milk until smooth. Cook and stir over medium-high heat until thickened and bubbly. Reduce heat to low; cook and stir for 2 minutes longer. Remove from the heat. Stir a small amount of hot filling into egg yolks; return all to the pan, stirring constantly. Bring to a gentle boil; cook and stir for 2 minutes. Remove from the heat.
3. Drain raisins, reserving 1/2 cup liquid. Gently stir liquid into filling. Add raisins, and nuts if desired. Pour into pie crust.
4. For meringue, in a small bowl, beat egg whites and salt on medium speed until soft peaks form. Gradually beat in sugar, 1 tablespoon at a time, on high until stiff peaks form. Spread over hot filling, sealing edge to crust.
5. Bake at 350° F for 15 minutes or until golden brown. Cool on a wire rack for 1 hour; refrigerate for 1–2 hours before serving. Refrigerate leftovers.

Playlist — Listen on Spotify!

SUPERMARKET FLOWERS Ed Sheeran

CARRY ON Kygo and Rita Ora

SUNFLOWER, VOL. 6 Harry Styles

SEE YOU AGAIN Carrie Underwood

COMING UP ROSES Keira Knightley

I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU The Rembrandts

LOVE AGAIN Dua Lipa

CARRY ON Kygo and Rita Ora

MY HEART WILL GO ON Celine Dion

COUNT ON ME Bruno Mars

LOVE AGAIN Celine Dion

LET IT BE The Beatles

I CAN SEE CLEARLY NOW Jimmy Cliff

LEAN ON ME Bill Withers

LOVING YOU IS EASY Sarah McLachlan

BLOOM Troye Sivan

THANK YOU FOR BEING A FRIEND Andrew Gold