



The morning after the engagement party, a rather hungover Felicity received this letter from Max while having a fortifying late breakfast of poached eggs on toast. Harriet was upstairs, still fast asleep, worn out after the stress of waiting for Evan to propose and the ensuing overexcitement when he finally did.

*Ashbury Manor,
12th September, 1796*

My dearest Felicity,

How are you this morning, my love? I am at present sitting at my writing desk after a hearty breakfast of bacon and eggs, and cursing myself that I did not enquire about your spine last night. You took quite a tumble off George yesterday, and at my expense might I add. Should you require a specialist doctor, I will send for one from

London immediately. Though, perhaps, I am worrying unnecessarily as you did not mention any pain when I saw you at our soirée and appeared well and were moving around as per normal; indeed you were as lovely as ever and I found it difficult to take my eyes off you... Anyway, before I start rambling on about your considerable charms, my reason for writing to you, dearest, is that if you are fully recovered, and up to the ride, would you care to come over to Ashbury Manor tomorrow for afternoon tea? If the day is fine, we could even take a picnic outside.

Bother, Evan has just asked me what I am writing, and when I told him of my intention, he thought a picnic sounded a splendid idea and now wishes me to extend the invitation to Harriet as well. I hope you do not mind if they join us? I told him to write his own letter to her but he says his head is in a jumble this morning. (Methinks he partook a little too much wine at the party but I cannot judge him for that as you well know!)

RSVP to us soonest.

All my love,

Max x

When Harriet appeared soon after, complaining of being parched and looking for a cup of tea, a glowing Felicity showed her the letter. Harriet urged Felicity to write back to Max straightaway in case

anything happened to change either his or Evan's mind about the outing, which Felicity did.

12th September, 1796

Dear Max,

Thank you for your letter. It was lovely to receive it and I confess I have been thinking about you too (but more of your kisses, not so much of your spine!) But it is kind of you to worry. I do not think I shall require a specialist doctor to ride all the way from London to look me over, but I appreciate your generous offer. I am quite well, and apart from a slight lingering stiffness when I arose this morning, I suffer no serious effects from my fall. The fortuitous packing of so many accoutrements did indeed provide an ample cushion!

As to your invitation, Harriet and I would be delighted to join you and Evan for afternoon tea indoors, or a picnic outdoors if the weather is clement. She wishes me to tell you, to tell Evan, to not concern himself with writing to her until he is quite well, and that she herself had three large glasses of Madeira at the party and did not rise until eleven o'clock this morning.

We shall drive over in the buggy and aim to be at Ashbury at three o'clock tomorrow (depending on George's mood).

Love Felicity x

Their plan to spend the afternoon with their fiancés was somewhat thwarted when Mrs Snelling popped over the next morning and heard about the outing from their father. Shocked, she insisted that she play chaperone because two young ladies left alone with two gentlemen, even if they were engaged, wasn't at all proper. So Felicity and Harriet reluctantly consented to her accompanying them. Max wrote to Felicity the day after the outing and she received his letter by afternoon post.

*Ashbury Manor,
14th September, 1796*

My dearest Felicity,

It was wonderful to see you yesterday, my love, and to gaze upon your sweet face once again. It was a pity that the day proved too cold and windy for a picnic outdoors but I hope our parlour was an adequate substitute for Mother Nature.

You must forgive me if, at first, I seemed quiet and withdrawn. I seem to start off that way when I am with people, but you always manage to bring me out of myself so wonderfully and then I cannot stop talking. How do you manage to converse easily with me when I am so unforthcoming? You must tell me your secret.

I was a little surprised to see Mrs Snelling with you playing

chaperone. To my mind it was quite unnecessary but I suppose for propriety's sake we need to acquiesce for now. However, it did make me all the more determined for us to be married and away to Derbyshire at once!

With that said, is the beginning of October too soon for our wedding?

All my love,

Max x

PS: I am enclosing the banknote that I gave you and which you secretly tried to return via my jacket pocket when it was hanging over the back of the chair. Dearest, it is yours to do with as you wish, please do not feel you have to give it back. My deplorable behaviour that night still haunts me!

Felicity laughed when she read about Max's eagerness to be married so they could escape her nosy neighbour. But she was also pleased, although little stressed, that he was suggesting the beginning of October for the wedding. She asked Harriet if it was even feasible, to which Harriet replied that 'anything was feasible if one was in love', and that she and Evan were also wishing to get married as soon as possible. So, could Felicity please hurry up and organise a date so they could schedule their wedding afterwards? Felicity wrote back to Max the next morning after a night of tossing and turning.

15th September, 1796

Dearest Max,

That is very naughty of you to return your banknote! Although I was happy enough to use it to rent a room in London, it is far too much money to have lying idle around the house. I will accept it, but do not be surprised if you discover all those dear to me have been showered with gifts (I include you in that dear company, of course).

As for us being chaperoned by Aunt, I agree it was frustrating but there is always a way around these things. For example, a chance meeting by the lake could always occur if you happened to be out walking in that area in the early afternoon?

And as for your wish to have the wedding at the beginning of October, my dress is well underway and should be finished shortly (indeed I have another fitting this morning) so really I have no excuse as to why we shouldn't. In fact, I have spent the whole night thinking about ~~you~~ what you said, and I agree wholeheartedly - let us be married soonest!

To that end I have asked father to ask Mr Austen if there is a free date in the church schedule. I shall keep you posted as to the answer.

Love Felicity x

PS: I have no idea as to how or why I can converse easily with you, believe me, there is no secret. It is probably because I simply cannot resist teasing you. I like it immensely.

Felicity slipped out of the house after lunch the next afternoon with the excuse of going for a long walk. She was in a state of high agitation, as any number of things could keep her from meeting up with Max. The timing could be wrong, there may be other people at the lake or he might decide it is unseemly to meet up alone before they are married. She didn't need to worry on any of these counts.

*Ashbury Manor,
16th September, 1796*

My darling Fliss,

I have just returned to Ashbury after our rendezvous at the lake, rather less wet and muddy than the previous time, but even more besotted with you if that is possible. Holding you and kissing you just now was heavenly. I can find no other word to describe it, nor do I wish to. I believe that I will be walking every day to the lake this week. Will you be there?

Love Max x

Felicity herself turned up back at the house, looking rather rumped, her cheeks flushed from Max's uninhibited kisses and wandering hands. She knew that meeting him in broad daylight where anyone could see them was risky. Perhaps she should mention a midnight tryst? But would he think her unladylike?

17th September, 1796

Dearest Max,

I would gladly meet you every day, but I cannot guarantee that I can, as I now have much wedding preparation. Mr Austin has confirmed that Saturday 5th October is free, and he has also booked Harriet and Evan in the week after, so we are both in a fluster.

But if you are amenable, might I suggest meeting up in the field where you proposed at midnight tomorrow? As you know, there is a rather private copse of trees nearby?

Love Felicity x

Ashbury Manor

18th September, 1796

My darling Fliss,

I have vague memories of the field and even less of the copse, but I do remember the joy I felt when you agreed to be my wife. It is etched into my heart. I feel I should like to propose to you again, properly. Dearest, I will see you at midnight (this time sober as a judge)!

Love Max x

That night, Felicity excitedly awaited the grandfather clock to strike midnight, dressed warmly and sneaked out of the side door. She discovered Max dressed in a long black overcoat, leaning against the oak tree and looking broodingly handsome in the moonlight; rather like he did in every fantasy she had of him. Her stomach flipped as he took a velvet box out of his coat pocket, sank to one knee and proposed to her anew.

19th September, 1796

Darling Max,

I keep staring at the gorgeous diamond ring you gave me last night, hardly able to believe my eyes. It is true that somehow I did not feel like we were properly engaged because I had no ring, but I did not expect one of this size and beauty. It is wholly overwhelming. And your proposal speech was wonderful, not a slur to be heard this time,

dearest. I could only say “I will” quietly at the time but inside I was shouting it louder - I WILL! OF COURSE I WILL!

As for afterwards, in the copse, all I can say is I went back to the house feeling like I was walking on air and extremely happy. Is it unladylike to say that I cannot wait to be sharing your bed properly? I urge you to order a large shipment of French letters as soon as possible. If that statement is very untoward then I stand guilty as charged (but somehow I think you will forgive me for it).

I love love love you,

Your Fliss x

PS: Mrs Sutton, if you have steamed open this letter and are reading it, I beg you to please keep the information privy to yourself. (I shall know if you do not as I will hear it from Mrs Snelling!)



Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed this bonus content!



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