

From the Private Diary of Lucia Dashing, age 14

December 1800

Dear, dear Diary,

The most amazing thing has happened today! Francesca was married, and—oh, well, Cesca's wedding was amazing, too, but this...this! Oh, diary, I'm in love. Complete, utter, all-consuming love. The name of my beloved? His initials are A.S. I shall reveal no more!

Oh, but I must write an account of Cesca's wedding. It was lovely. Oh, I do hope that one day I have such a lovely wedding—larger and in London, of course, but just as lovely. Francesca and Lord Winterbourne look as though they were fashioned solely one for the other. She is so dark and petite, and he so tall and intense. I know they will be blissfully happy.

Mamma cried when the carriage pulled away, taking the couple to the marquess's estate in Yorkshire, and Father stared after it a long while. John headed to the stables. That brother of mine simply can't get enough of the horses. But I had another pursuit in mind!

Oh, diary, am I terribly, terribly wicked? I confess that I could hardly look away from A.S. long enough to observe the marriage ceremony. Worse, he seemed to feel my eyes on him. He gave me several dark looks. But diary! Those fierce scowls only made my heart beat faster. He is so deliciously dangerous, so delightfully unpredictable. A girl never knows when he might catch her by the waist and clasp her tightly against him, bringing his lips down on hers for...

Oh, dear! Do you see? I am a dreadfully wicked girl! The true measure of my wickedness? I joined his name with mine on the oak tree just past the bake house. I carved *Alex & Lucia Forever* into the tree trunk. Oh, diary, do you think my wish will come true? I simply cannot bear it if I don't win Alex's love. With Alex's love and that new bonnet I saw in Town during the Season, my life will be complete.

Love,
Lucia

P.S. Diary, as long as you are granting wishes, I would also like a new pair of kid gloves. White, please.