

Title (up to 20 words) - Love In France

Strapline (up to 40 words) - Love is hard when you have to follow the rules.

Copy (between 900 and 1000 words) -

Light. Beautiful light. Blinding light. Light that makes you want to smile. I pushed back the blanket and dangled my legs over the edge of the bed. There was a crash and I looked up to see my friend, Margaret up and looking at the hairbrush that lay on the floor of the room. I jumped up and walked quickly over to the dresser, grabbed the fallen hairbrush, and yanked it through my hair. When I was satisfied with my hair, I picked a dress from our plain wardrobe and got dressed. After the last button was done up at the back, Margaret and I walked to the kitchens to collect a breakfast for ourselves and our mistress, or as she prefers, friend: Mary, Queen of Scots.

As we walked up the grand staircase, the Dauphin of France, Francis, walked past us, smiling as he went. We walked past maids and squires, lords and ladies, princes, and princesses on our way to Mary's chambers and all recognised us as ladies' maids of the Queen of Scots. We knocked on her door and a light airy voice said "enter", as we walked through the door the smiling face of Mary greeted us. We ate and talked about the upcoming wedding. After Mary had finished, we dressed her in her favourite red dress and shoes, then walked down to the main hall to meet Francis for wedding preparations.

When we arrived, Francis was in deep conversation with Catherine, but as we approached, he broke off and came over. He kissed Mary and addressed me and Margaret; "You two are going to have a dress made for the wedding so you will be meeting a tailor later today." Upon hearing this Catherine, who had been standing nearby, stalked over, and voiced her opinion in Mary's direction as if she was trying to get her to see reason. Francis let out an exasperated sigh and said to Catherine, "we have been through this, they deserve to have a new dress after everything they have done for us over the years."

We left the hall and went back to Mary's quarters to prepare for the fitting. We decided before the tailor arrived that we would have matching blue dresses in a plain material. When the women arrived to fit our dresses, we were really excited, and were thinking about how kind Francis was. We were poked, prodded, positioned and pinned for the best part of an hour before they were happy with our dresses. We then had a visit from a shoemaker to help us choose some shoes that went with our dresses. Then by the time we had decided on accessories, it was time for dinner. Mary, Margaret, and I went down to the private dining hall for an exquisite lunch of soup, sandwiches, and cake with strawberries for pudding. We spent the

afternoon in the gardens, playing chess, dancing around in circles, and climbing trees. We were joined later, by Francis who became the fourth person in a garden-wide game of hide and seek. By supertime, we were all happy, tired and, let's face it, a little muddy.

The next few days consisted of greeting people from all over Europe who had arrived for the upcoming wedding. We greeted both French and Scottish nobles alike, we also greeted Mary's mother and some of Francis' distant relatives. But one day we were standing in the entrance hall, when a very powerful Catholic noble arrived, Lord Archambeau. With him there were three young girls about my age and behind them was a young man who was maybe Francis' age, maybe younger. He looked over at me and in that moment, I felt a pang of longing. He looked away and I felt shame wash over me. He kissed Mary's hand and then moved on to greet Francis. I knew that he would never love me as I was just a handmaid, and he was the son of possibly the most powerful noble in France.

Later that day I was sitting in the gardens reading, when the son of Lord Archambeau walked past, but as he did, he tripped over my outstretched foot. I immediately jumped up in an attempt to help him but he talked me off saying it was entirely his fault and asking if my foot was alright. He looked me in the eyes, and I felt that pang of longing again, I blushed, and he laughed. He introduced himself as Matthew Archambeau and I introduced myself in return. We sat on the grass and talked for what seemed like forever then Mary came and informed me that she and I would be dining in private that night.

Over the next few days, Matthew and I spent a lot of time together, walking and talking. We laughed at each other and found comfort when things were wrong. Mary noticed my spending a lot of time with him and brought it up when we were alone one afternoon. She teased me and made me blush but was a comfort to talk to.

Preparations continued as normal despite my affections towards Matthew. One afternoon, I was approached by Lord Archambeau himself; it didn't occur to me that he might be angry about my friendship with his son and so I greeted him politely and asked what I could do to help. At this he drew me into an empty corridor and said "What do you think you are doing with my son!"