

A sweet summer romance flash fiction collection

By
Fireflies and
Moonlight

ABBAY DOWNEY

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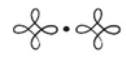
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BY FIREFLIES AND MOONLIGHT

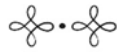
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A Promised Adventure



An Adventurous Hearts Story



July 1905

Brooklyn, New York City

All around Beth Harrison and her husband, Fred, families, couples, and groups of friends frolicked along the Luna Park boardwalk. Sights and sounds spilled from each building they passed, the kind of delights that would usually enchant Beth and that made Coney Island a sought-after destination.

But how could she think about fun when Fred had forgotten her birthday?

Fred gently tugged on a curly lock that she'd left loose from her pompadour hairstyle, an endearing habit on days when she wasn't disheartened, but not one she welcomed now. When she didn't smile at the gesture as usual, he bumped her shoulder with his. "What serious thoughts are running through my beautiful girl's head today?"

She should just tell him. What was the harm in reminding him it was her birthday? They could laugh about his forgetfulness and move on to enjoy the day.

After all, since they hadn't been able to afford a honeymoon after their wedding four months ago, Fred had arranged for them to ride along with his dear friend Jensen on the Glidden Tour, a ten-day auto race through New England. The belated wedding trip was a dream come true for Beth's adventure-loving heart, and the friend she'd already found in their driver, Flora Montfort, was an unexpected blessing. Fred had even convinced Jensen and Flora to make a stop at Coney Island before the tour and now he continued to explore the park with Beth while the other two rested from the heat.

He really was a dear.

Fred laced his fingers through hers and led the way through throngs of amusement-seekers. Beth tried to get him to slow down outside the Dragon's Gorge roller coaster, but Fred shot her a full-blown grin and kept tugging her along. She bit her bottom lip, delighted now. Even if he didn't realize it was her birthday, at least he was giving her an adventure.

They rounded a corner and Fred turned abruptly so that his body blocked her view before she could see what attractions were nearby. "You have to close your eyes."

She reared back. “Fred, I can’t wander around this crowd with my eyes closed.”

“You can if I guide you. Trust me, I’ll make sure you’re safe.” And for good measure, he leaned down and planted his lips on her forehead, the contact sending a warm current spiraling through her that was much more pleasant than the stifling air.

Beth closed her eyes and let him take her hand again. He maneuvered her with great care until the air turned cooler and the sounds of revelry faded. Her feet no longer tapped on wooden boards. It was quiet all around them except for the faint lapping of water against stone. Where had he brought her?

After a pause, Fred bent beside her and guided Beth’s foot to step down. “Careful now. Step slowly.”

She gripped his shoulder as the floor tipped under her. “Is this a boat? What’s going on?”

Fred didn’t respond, instead using his touch to help her settle onto a seat. It had to be a boat. Were they going on a tour of the coast, perhaps?

Finally, Fred joined her on the bench and leaned close, his breath tickling her ear as he whispered, “Open your eyes.”

She did, only to find they were surrounded by darkness. The outline of his face was very close to hers, but she still had to search for his eyes in the inky black. “What now?”

He wrapped his arm around her as the little boat began moving slowly down what she decided must be a man-made canal. “Just watch.”

Relaxing into his embrace, Beth let anticipation wash away all the remnants of her earlier sadness. And she was glad she did when the boat slid through a heavy curtain, and they were surrounded by...more darkness.

As her eyes adjusted, tiny lights here and there gave just enough illumination for Beth to orient herself, glinting on the water and revealing low ceilings that resembled a cave. Next to her, Fred began humming a lovely, familiar melody.

“That’s the music from our first dance. At the Christmas ball.”

His lips curved into a soft smile. “I knew you’d remember.”

Beth glanced around the room again. “And the fact that no one else is riding this attraction...?”

“I arranged for the operator to give us a few extra minutes between riders.”

Her heart barely dared to hope, but he’d gone to such effort. It couldn’t have been for no reason. “Why?”

Fred slid his hand up her neck to nestle in her hair and pulled her close, his lips seeking hers. Beth leaned into the kiss, responding with all the delight his efforts brought to her heart until they were both breathless and thankful for the mostly dark, empty room.

“Happy birthday, my love. I hope you weren’t too disappointed thinking I’d forgotten. I know you love surprises.”

Of course he did. Beth ran her hand over his shoulder. “Fred Harrison, you’re the best husband a girl could ask for.”

And she found his lips again, not caring how disheveled they would be when they emerged.

The End

More than an Experiment





July 1909

Miami County, Indiana

Cressida Wright forced her eyes back to the papers she was trying to balance on her arm while taking notes. Gawking at the farmer that her partner, Dr. Andrew Boyle, was attempting to interview wouldn't make the man more likely to expand on his monosyllabic answers. But those icy blue eyes held so much depth that her curiosity was piqued.

And it didn't hurt that he had perfectly wavy hair and filled out a dusty white shirt and brown vest in the most appealing way.

Next to her, Dr. Boyle sighed, ran a hand through his gray hair, and tried again. "Mr. Martin, isn't there any information you can give us about what made your steer grow to such an impressive size?"

“Nope.”

Leo Martin had refused to speak more than that since the moment they stepped foot on his farm. He hadn't told them to go away, though.

Peeking around the two men who now stood in tense silence, Cressida gestured toward the barn, a well-kept building painted traditional red. “Perhaps we could go see the animal?”

Mr. Martin's eyes flashed in her direction as he growled the longest response yet. “He has a name.”

Dr. Boyle threw up his hands and huffed back toward the train that had brought them straight to the Martin farm, muttering about a stubborn hick impeding science. But Cressida took the impassioned response as progress. Fixing a smile on her face that she hoped would communicate her genuine excitement for being there, she held her pencil at the ready. “And what is that name?”

The farmer hesitated, looking her up and down in a way that would normally make her defensive. But she sensed he was open to working with her when so many others weren't. As a woman employed by the USDA at the Purdue University research station, she constantly had to prove she was as capable as any of the male research assistants. If this trip went well and they could secure an agreement to study Mr. Martin's record-setting steer, it would prove she didn't belong in the domestic sciences wing, after all.

Cressida waved toward the barn again. “I’d love to meet him. Perhaps you could arrange an introduction?”

The hint of a smile pulled Mr. Martin’s lips upward. Cressida suddenly found it hard to swallow. He was distracting enough. If he ever managed a full-blown grin, it would be impossible to focus on her work.

Without a word, he turned and headed toward the barn. Cressida took that as an invitation and followed, lifting her black pleated skirt a bit higher to avoid the mud that remained from a recent rain shower. At least she’d worn her most sensible shoes, an older pair with low heels and a stable, comfortable fit.

By the time she reached the barn, Mr. Martin stood waiting with his muscular arms crossed over an impossibly broad chest. He quirked one eyebrow at her. “What’s a lady like you doing on a research trip, anyway?”

Standing close together in the barn doorway, she could see sincere interest in his expression. But if she explained her love of agricultural research, would he tell her she ought to get married and stay home as most people did?

Letting a deep breath fortify her, Cressida took the chance. “Studying ways to improve the livelihood of Indiana farmers is my passion. There’s nothing more thrilling than discovering a new method that makes agriculture easier and more profitable.”

He nodded approvingly, his hand brushing her arm as he reached past to push the door open further. Tingles raced down her spine at the inadvertent

touch and the way his voice sounded so close to her ear. “You must have some history with farming. Most government people only come to gawk at Ben.”

Ben. She smiled at the affection in his voice when he said the name. “My father comes from a long line of Hoosier farmers. If I can do anything to make this life better, it’s worth all the time and effort.”

That truth must have been what he was waiting to hear. Mr. Martin strode into the barn, explaining Ben’s history as Cressida followed. “Ben was born in 1902. His parents weren’t large, but he was already setting records at birth.” He stopped by a stall and leaned against the gate. “Here he is, the world’s largest steer, Old Ben.”

Cressida heard shuffling in the shadows, then a huge brown nose appeared, sniffing at Mr. Martin’s shoulder from much higher than she expected. She had to take a step back to look up into the animal’s intelligent eyes, framed by one horn that curved forward and one that twisted upward. “Well, hello Ben.” She let the steer sniff her hand before addressing his owner. “How tall is he?”

Pride laced Mr. Martin’s words. “Six and a half feet. Almost that long, too.”

She scribbled the details in her notes. “And you haven’t done anything unusual with him? Different feed? A special care routine?”

Mr. Martin reached up to rub Ben’s nose affectionately. “Nothing. I wasn’t trying to be difficult with your partner. There’s just no answer to those questions. I’ve treated him the same as every other animal since birth.”

Cressida couldn't help smiling when he belied that claim by pulling a lump of sugar from his pocket and letting Ben lick it from his palm. "Except for maybe spoiling him a bit?"

Meeting her eyes, Mr. Martin finally offered the wide grin she'd been waiting for, and it was as breathtaking as she'd imagined. He took a half-step closer, his eyes warm. "Perhaps."

Their gazes remained locked together until Ben snorted, startling them both. Mr. Martin turned serious. "I've resisted letting anyone study Ben because they all treated him like a specimen. But I think you appreciate him as more than an experiment. So, I'll tell Dr. Boyle that a research team can visit. As long as you lead it."

Warmth spread through Cressida, as grateful for the chance to see him again as she was for the opportunity to have her own research team. She returned Mr. Martin's smile while reaching up to pat Ben's solid neck, finally feeling as if she had an ally...and maybe something more.

The End

Festival Fix





August 1910

Cora Laderman held the two pieces of her broken violin close to her chest, using one elbow to keep her white, lace-trimmed skirt out of the way as she rushed down Main Street. Every building was adorned with flags and buntings that fluttered in the hot August breeze. A line of automobiles interspersed with a few carriages filed past, and random strains of music from her fellow musicians warming up by the park pavilion chased her down the busy street.

The festive atmosphere was at odds with Cora's last ten minutes, during which Arnold Erikson had bumped into her and knocked the violin to its ruin. No amount of frivolity could erase the devastation of missing her opportunity to perform music she'd composed for the first time.

The only one who could repair her day was Wesley. They may have fought on the way to the town's annual Tomato Festival, but he was still her Mr. Fixit, the one who put everything back together when it fell apart. He would know what to do.

But would he stop in the middle of his game to help her after she'd accused him of choosing baseball over her concert?

Increasing her pace until she was nearly running, Cora passed the tomato eating contest and the stand where tomato pies and fried green tomatoes were being judged. Finally, the crowd surrounding the baseball field came into view. The crack of a bat echoed through the air and spectators cheered. Cora pushed her way to the fence around the field just in time to see Wesley rounding the bases while the opposing outfielders raced to get the ball.

In the dugout to her left, Wesley's teammates shouted for him to hurry. The third baseman caught the ball and prepared to throw it to the catcher waiting at home plate. Wesley took one giant leap forward and slid on his side toward the base in a cloud of dust.

The crowd held a collective breath until the dust cleared and they could finally see the umpire standing with both hands spread out parallel to the ground. "Safe!"

Cheers erupted around Cora. A spectator behind her mentioned that it was Wesley's third run of the game. Pride welled in her chest, almost intense enough to drown out the worry over getting back in time for the concert. Wesley—the strong, capable man who'd married her fifteen years ago and who helped her raise three children—could still surprise her by being quite the star baseball player.

The next batter on Wesley's team walked out to take his turn while Wesley brushed himself off and started walking back to the dugout, grinning at the crowd. Halfway there, he caught sight of Cora and froze.

Cora tried to communicate with her eyes how much she regretted lashing out at him for not giving up this game to be at her concert. Wesley walked ever so slowly off the field, tapping his lips once with a finger, their signal that she was chewing her bottom lip without realizing again. Cora immediately released her lip from her teeth and met him behind the dugout.

When she was finally looking up into his weathered, kind face, she held out the broken instrument. "I should have been here, Wesley. This game is as important to you as the concert is to me. But there will be other concerts. Maybe I can compose a new piece for us to play in the fall instead of this one—"

Wesley's finger now pressed against her lips, silencing the torrent of words. Cora met his unwavering gaze, feeling him pry the pieces of her violin from her hands. "There will be other games, too. There's only one first time my girl gets to perform music she wrote."

Disappearing into the dugout, Wesley returned a moment later with his leather bag. He dug through baseball equipment to pull a roll of adhesive bandage tape from the first aid supplies he kept handy. With deft fingers, he wrapped the tape around the violin, securing the pieces together. He wiggled the

neck a bit, proving the fix would hold at least for long enough to get her through the concert.

Relief lifted Cora's heart until she heard Wesley's teammates calling for him. He may have fixed her problem, as always, but they were still at an impasse. She needed to return to the quartet, and his teammates were depending on him.

Cheers rose from the spectators again, but Wesley chose that moment to step close, sliding one arm around Cora's waist and pulling her against his body. With his bag slung over his shoulder, he turned them away from the field and started walking. Cora tried to stop, but he pulled her along with an amused smirk. "You're not going to miss your concert just to thank me, are you?"

Her mind raced to catch up to what was happening. "What about the game? You were doing so much for your team. You can't leave them now."

Wesley stopped mid-step, turning to face Cora without releasing her. He gently tilted her chin so she had to look up at him, unable to miss his expression of obvious devotion. "I told the fellas I'd be leaving at one o'clock, no matter what. It's just a game, beautiful. Seeing you shine is much more important."

She should have known he'd had it under control all along. Cora reached up to touch his dust-streaked cheek. "I'm sorry for picking a fight with you this morning."

Wesley bent to press his lips to hers in an all-too-brief kiss. If they hadn't been standing in the middle of Main Street, Cora might have pulled him closer

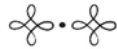
and shown him just how much his thoughtfulness meant. Instead, she let him guide her back toward the pavilion, his words sending a wave of love through her. “Let’s go. My girl has a big debut, and I wouldn’t miss it for anything.”

The End

Digging for Forever



An Adventurous Hearts Story



August 1911

Jensen, Utah

Charlotte Bauer wondered if one could have dirt permanently embedded under her skin.

The rocky hills rising out of the Utah landscape provided no relief from the burning sun for the members of the Exploration Society from Milwaukee, who had spent over a month working to add to the collection of dinosaur bones uncovered by Mr. Earl Douglass's crew.

Crouched in a three-foot square pit about six inches deep and using a brush to ever so gently move dirt aside as she searched for anything that resembled bone, Charlotte questioned why she'd agreed to go on another Exploration Society expedition in the first place. As much as she loved archeology and adventure, a woman could only take so much hot, difficult work before she started longing for the comforts of a clean bed and a scented bath.

A glance to her right reminded Charlotte quickly enough. The reason for her presence at the dig site was several feet away, sitting at the edge of a pit just like hers. Tall and bulky with pale blond hair and the warmest brown eyes she'd ever seen, Ernst Wagner turned as if he felt her gaze. Then his face broke out in a wide smile, one that started her heart fluttering in her chest.

Unfortunately, the moment was marred by the melodious voice of Miss Honoria Meyer, a new member of the Exploration Society. "Oh, Mr. Wagner, look how much progress you've made." Miss Meyer knelt by Ernst's spot, stealing his attention from Charlotte.

Charlotte found it impossible to forget that while Ernst had agreed to come on the trip, it wasn't at her behest. Rather, Ernst had hesitated until Miss Meyer batted her luxurious eyelashes at him and asked if he was joining their expedition team. Ernst had nodded immediately.

At that moment, Charlotte knew she couldn't skip this expedition. Ernst might not have expressed romantic feelings, but he'd been calling on Charlotte for months. While she'd expected him to declare his intentions by now, she had to accept that he was shy and thoughtful, a man who took his time about important things.

Or that was what she told herself when she got impatient. Which was often.

Thankfully, Miss Meyer soon went on her way. After another hour, though, clouds began crowding in, providing a welcome respite from the sun but also

halting the crew's work. Afternoon storms were common in the mountains, ranging from light showers to heavy downpours. They'd all learned it was better to pack up when the clouds came than to have to gather supplies and dry them out after a deluge.

A group of tents had been erected at the base of the mountains, consisting of one for cooking and dining, several for supplies, and a variety of sizes for the crew. After putting her tools away, Charlotte marched to the small tent she shared with her twin sister, Alice, hoping to repair her attitude with a nap and a good amount of prayer. It wasn't five minutes, however, before a muffled rapping on the tent post caught Charlotte's attention.

"Come in." Charlotte pushed up from her cot to address her visitor, reluctant until Ernst's face appeared in the open tent flap. Ever the gentleman, he didn't enter but rested both forearms above his head where the tent posts met. He leaned in from the entrance, muscles flexing under rolled-up shirt sleeves and eyes like melted chocolate searching Charlotte's. "Want to take a chance on the rain and walk along the creek with me like last week? That was nice."

Charlotte's prickly mood melted into a warm puddle, and she nodded, following him out of the tent and toward the few trees at the base of the mountains. Ernst didn't mince words, a lovely contrast to the nuanced small talk

of high society back home. “Are you sure you prefer to talk with me instead of Miss Meyer?”

The instant the words left her lips, Charlotte wished she could pull them back. She sounded like a petulant little girl.

But Ernst chuckled, a warm, deep sound that soothed her embarrassment. She gulped a little at his knowing grin. “Always. Miss Meyer is nice enough, but I’m here for you.”

Charlotte bit her lower lip, wishing desperately that she didn’t need more assurance of his feelings. As if he sensed her uncertainty, Ernst pulled her to a stop by the rolling water. He stood so close that Charlotte had to crane her neck to meet his sincere gaze. “I mean it, Charlotte. Once I cleared the time away from my job, I couldn’t agree to come fast enough. But I can see how you might not know that because I haven’t done a good job of showing you that...well, I think I’m in love with you.”

Warm tingling raced up and down Charlotte’s body. He loved her and wanted to be there...for her. Beautiful Miss Meyer wasn’t the reason at all. “I love you, too, Ernst.”

A wide grin brightened his face, and his eyes lit with joy. Ernst cradled her face with both hands and pressed his lips to her forehead, leaving a warm impression she would cherish forever. Then he wrapped Charlotte in his arms, one hand pressing her head to his chest. Sensations enveloped her—the warmth

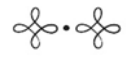
of his skin through his cotton shirt, the overwhelming wonder of being surrounded by so much muscle, the scent of soap that made her wonder if he'd washed up before coming to find her.

Ernst released Charlotte all too soon. But then he held her chin with his fingertips, bringing her gaze up to meet his. "Now, are you ready to keep walking? I'm anxious to talk with my best girl."

Despite her suddenly weak knees, Charlotte nodded and draped her arm around his. There might be more successful archeological digs in her future, but none would be as memorable as this one, the one that started their forever.

The End

A Changing Wave





Sheepshead Bay, Brooklyn, NY

August 1914

“Anna Beth Kendall, I know that expression. I accompanied you to a swimming competition at your parents’ request. That better be all that’s going on here.”

Crossing her arms over her high-waisted dress and likely crumpling the lace along the bodice, Anna Beth forced her attention away from the line of young women standing on the sandy beach wearing calf-length silk tunics and bathing caps. Spectators, press, and officials hired by the National Women’s Life Saving League gathered around the swimmers, awaiting the start of the race. If she got distracted by her companion, she would miss the moment she’d been working toward for months.

But Jonathan Parker’s demanding words rankled. Her nerves about the day spurred a response she’d been longing to deliver since the first time her parents insisted she let him call on her. “If it bothers you to see women fighting to do the

same things men are freely allowed to do, then I suggest you leave. And don't worry about escorting me to the opera next week. I'll manage fine on my own from now on."

Jonathan's sharply cut chin rose in the air and he all but sniffed in derision. "Fine. I can recognize when I'm not wanted."

A slight pang hit Anna Beth as she watched Jonathan stomp away—as well as one could stomp in ankle-deep sand, anyway. Her parents wouldn't be happy she'd told him to go, and she certainly could have been kinder about it. But she couldn't muster a bit of regret for finally being rid of his dour outlook and old-fashioned expectations.

Behind Anna Beth, a decidedly more friendly male voice cut through the shouts of children enjoying the beach and the cawing of seagulls overhead. "Ah, excuse me. I'm looking for the designer of these ladies' swimming costumes. I was told to come over here."

Thankful it wasn't Jonathan returning, Anna Beth offered a real smile as she turned around—only to find herself drowning in a pair of blue eyes that rivaled the clearest, brightest pool water she'd ever seen. And they were fixed quizzically on her. *Right. The designer.* "You're in luck. I designed the outfits they'll swim in today."

A half smile lifted one corner of the man's wide lips as if he was delighted to learn that fact while at the same time completely unsurprised by it. He stepped

forward with his hand outstretched to shake hers. “Jake Lamont. I’m a writer for the Tribune. I thought our female readers might enjoy a story about how the female swimmers’ garments impact their speed and movement in competitions. Perhaps you could give me some insights?”

Anna Beth’s pulse jumped. This was her chance to put the cause her swimmer friends had worked so hard for in the spotlight. “I would love to. But I would advise you to wait until the race is over. I think you’ll have a much bigger story to tell then.”

One dark eyebrow arched. “You’ve captured my attention, Miss...?”

Anna Beth’s mouth went dry with the thought that perhaps he meant those words on a more personal level. But surely not. They’d barely even met. “Anna Beth Kendall.”

His smile broadened and she realized he still held her hand in his warm, strong grip. “I’m quite pleased to meet you.”

Their eyes locked until one of the officials started calling for the crowd to quiet down. Together, Mr. Lamont and Anna Beth turned to watch what she knew was going to be a moment no one expected. When the official signaled for the swimmers to get ready, the women acted in unison, tugging off their socially acceptable tunics to reveal new bathing costumes, the ones Anna Beth had fussed over and worried about. These garments, slim and form-fitting, also

revealed the ladies' bare legs and shoulders. They were downright scandalous. And so much better suited to speed in the water.

Murmurs rose across the beach. The officials withdrew and clumped together, likely discussing whether the costumes violated the rules of the Amateur Athletic Union. On the beach, the women stood tall and strong, one even holding a "Votes for Women" sign someone had handed her.

Pride welled in Anna Beth's chest. Being allowed to wear appropriate clothing for their sport was the first step toward women across the country gaining more independence. And creating those bathing costumes was the small part Anna Beth got to play.

Next to her, Mr. Lamont finished scribbling notes and glanced her way. She hesitated to meet his gaze, though. If it had been Jonathan, he would have curled his lips in distaste at the immodest display. Many men would be angry. What would Mr. Lamont's expression hold? But maybe more importantly, why did it matter what this reporter thought of her beliefs?

Drawing a strengthening breath, Anna Beth tipped her face up toward him and examined his handsome face. Raised eyebrows but paired with a slowly growing smile that made her feel as if she could take on the world.

Mr. Lamont cleared his throat. "Well, now I'm all the more curious to learn everything I can about the woman behind those perfectly outrageous costumes.

It appears they're getting ready to swim and I don't want to miss that. Perhaps you'd allow me to escort you to the soda shop afterward?"

Anna Beth's pulse skittered wildly. "To appease your readers' curiosity, I assume?"

Mr. Lamont leaned closer than necessary, giving her a whiff of citrus pomade. "On the contrary. This is...a more personal request."

He was asking her to step out with him without the benefit of her parents' approval or socially acceptable calls at her home.

How liberating.

How charming.

How utterly, exactly what she'd been waiting for.

A flutter stirred in Anna Beth's stomach. As her friends sliced through the water on their way to achieving their dreams, she hoped the man of hers might be standing right there on the beach.

The End



Abbey Downey started writing inspirational romance stories during naptime when her kids were babies and found she couldn't stop. She is the author of the Adventurous Hearts series from Wild Heart Books, with the new Headliners and Heartstrings series releasing soon. Abbey also works with Spark Flash Fiction producing a quarterly digital publication that contains love stories under 1000 words.

A life-long Midwestern girl, Abbey lives in central Indiana with her husband and two kids. She loves watching her kids in their activities and fixing up a 125-year-old farmhouse with her husband. Want to read more by Abbey? Find all her books and writing at <https://abbeydowney.com>.