

THE MATCHMAKERS.

[By Keith Kenyon.]

"Well, I'm here!" called a gay young voice just outside the door.

The three elderly bachelors turned from the breakfast table and viewed with amazement a very pretty young person who now stood in the doorway regarding them with a pair of wonderful violet eyes.

"Well, uncles dear," she pouted, "I'm homesick already! Not one of you seems to be glad to see me; and I've traveled miles just to be with you." Tears appeared in the violet eyes.

"Why—why—why!" faltered Uncle Anthony, jumping from his chair and moving toward the newcomer with outstretched hands. "We are delighted, my dear—only you did surprise us. I only received your mother's letter an hour ago."

"I suppose father forgot to mail it. It was written a week ago and I—we all wondered why you didn't answer. I told them I supposed you were so paralyzed with joy at my coming that you simply couldn't reply. Well, here I am. Now, what are you going to do with me?" She regarded them whimsically.

"First have some breakfast," invited Uncle David, pecking a kiss at her cheek.

Uncle Benjamin rang for Mrs. Muffet, whose disapproving expression did not dissolve even beneath the warmth of Helena's dazzling smile.

"Another plate, please, Mrs. Muffet," directed Uncle Anthony. "Will you have a chop, Helena, my dear?"

"If you please, uncle—oh, dear, it's no wonder I can't tell you apart when I haven't seen you in dozens and dozens of years!"

"Not since you were five, Helena," corrected Uncle David gravely. "And you must be—let me see; why, bless me, child, you are seventeen!"

"I'm as old as I look—or as young, uncles dear—only tell me, please, which one of you is which?"

Then Helena Strang was properly introduced to her three charming



"Well, I'm Here," Called a Gay Young Voice.

granduncles, who proceeded to enjoy her youthful enthusiasm to the utmost.

Uncle Anthony loved to recite his favorite poems to Helena, and in her he found a gentle, appreciative listener. Uncle David challenged her to a nightly game of chess and was highly delighted when she vanquished him, as she frequently did. It was Uncle Benjamin who was the sportsman of the family, and together he and Helena drove each day to the country club and tramped over the golf course, becoming, in due time, delightfully chummy.

Then the three old gentlemen conceived a plot to marry Helena to one of their neighbors, Jack Lyman, an altogether desirable young man who, on his part, lost no time in falling in love with the fascinating grand-niece.

It was about this time that a remarkable change took place in Helena. Something seemed to have dampened her high spirits, and she went about with a depressed and half-frightened look on her charming face.

The granduncles noticed it, and, finally, Mrs. Muffet was called in consultation. "I might classify her disease as a guilty conscience," Mrs. Muffet diagnosed, with a sour smile.

"Mrs. Muffet!" roared the three old gentlemen in chorus. Then Uncle Anthony arose in his most dignified manner and informed his housekeeper that if she would step into the library he would pay her up to the first of the year and that Amos would drive her to the station at once.

"I'll go," said Mrs. Muffet angrily, "but before I do leave I'd like to ask me question—how is it that Miss Helena came here twelve years ago with a pair of beautiful brown eyes—and now her eyes are blue—blue as violets?"

The trio of uncles gasped. "Fiddsticks!" ejaculated Uncle Benjamin, first to recover.

"They are very blue indeed," murmured Uncle Anthony, tenderly. "I've heard that the eyes of infants frequently do assume another color in after years," defended Uncle David.

"Miss Helena was no infant when she came here before, sir," returned

Mrs. Muffet grimly. "She was five years old, for I was chambermaid then and I took care of her. Her eyes were brown like her mother's and her hair was the same color—and she gave no promise of looking like this one. If you'll excuse my saying so, she couldn't be as handsome!"

"Then—then, who is our Helena?" demanded Uncle David fiercely.

"An impostor!"

"Absurd!" almost shrieked the three uncles in concert, and Mrs. Muffet was allowed to depart under suspended sentence of dismissal until they could investigate the case of the niece whose relationship to them she had so boldly questioned.

"What shall we do?" asked Uncle Anthony, feebly, when they were alone.

"Let us get the truth," said Uncle Benjamin firmly.

So they went in a body into the garden on their distasteful errand. They came upon her suddenly at the turn of a corner arbor. Jack Lyman was with her, and what the would-be inquisitors saw made them forget their errand.

The young people did not see the three anxious old faces—they were too deeply absorbed in the telling of a wonderful story whose setting should always be in a rose garden.

Guiltily the granduncles tiptoed back to the house. "I will wire the news to Isabel and ask their consent," whispered Uncle Anthony.

At which his brothers blushed rosy red, for they knew that meant a speedy solution of the problem. It would soon be known to them whether they had indeed been entertaining their grandniece or an impostor, as Mrs. Muffet had charged.

"She is a dear child, anyway," declared Uncle David gruffly, and the others nodded assent.

Uncle Anthony scratched off a telegram, of which the others approved:

"Helena is quite well and wants your consent to her engagement to Jack Lyman, our particular friend."

"We should receive a reply by dinner time," said David as he prepared to take the telegram to the station.

Helena did not make her appearance until half an hour before dinner. She pleaded a headache, and she looked quite pale and drooping when she came down stairs and joined the waiting trio on the veranda.

Mrs. Strang's telegram arrived almost precisely at the same moment. Uncle Anthony opened it with shaking fingers and read:

"Are you crazy? Helena is with me and ill with whooping cough, an absurd ailment for a girl of seventeen. Will write. Isabel."

Without a word the distressed old man passed the message to David, who read it in grim silence and then handed it to Benjamin.

Helena stood before them, her eyes looking like drowned blue violets in her pale face.

"I have something to tell you, all," she began with a catch in her voice. "I have told Mr. Lyman—Jack—and he has forgiven me. I hope you will, too, for I love you all so dearly!"

"What is it, my dear?" asked Uncle Anthony compassionately.

Helena slipped to her knees and hid her face in his lap.

"I am not Helena Strang," she confessed tearfully. "I am quite another Helena—Helena Clifton. I have been Mrs. Strang's private secretary for several years—I am twenty-four. I never had a home. I was brought up in an orphan asylum and when I was old enough to go out into the world I found a place in a store and worked until I could save money enough to take a business course; when I was competent Mrs. Strang employed me."

"When she decided to go to Montreal she gave me six months' vacation—and I had nowhere to go. There had been much talk of Helen coming down to her uncles and it was all arranged, but at the last moment she decided to go to Canada with her parents. Before she went, she proposed this scheme to me and insisted that I should impersonate her as your grandniece."

"It was a great temptation to me to come down here—and so I came. You know the rest—and if you want to send for the police, you may! But you have been wonderfully kind to me and I don't believe Helena Strang could love you more than I do! So here!"

She rose and faced them with tearful eyes and trembling lips.

"Dear me!" coughed Uncle Anthony, looking properly distressed.

"Humph—nonsense!" growled Uncle David. "A man may have more than one grandniece, eh, boys? Well, Helena Clifton, I'll adopt you as my niece here and now! I like you." He held out his arms and Helena promptly accepted their protection.

"It's my turn now," reminded Uncle Benjamin, rather jealously.

After Helena had cried a little on each kindly shoulder, and still blushing divinely, and with a pathetic quaver in her voice, she resumed: "I have promised to marry Jack Lyman, uncles. I told him all about it and he said it didn't matter in the least, so we are engaged—provided, of course, you give your consent."

The three old matchmakers looked very uncertain indeed, but while they were pretending to consider her serious question, their frowns gave way to delighted grins, for Jack Lyman himself came striding up the path.

"Here comes our prospective nephew-in-law," announced Uncle Anthony cheerfully.

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AT KAPPER'S SPUR

By IZOLA FORRESTER.

The Walters' ranch was the largest on the mountain, and they had a good house in the little town besides. But Rita Henty had been at school for four years down at Laramie, and Len Walters had never gone beyond the course he had right there at Kapper's Spur. It had been part of the fun of coming home summers to tease him and show him the decided difference between a person who has studied at Laramie and one who has spent the best years of his teens herding cattle.

Miss Baxter, the new schoolteacher, was to arrive on a Saturday, and just for nonsense Rita went to the station to meet her. Len was there, too. There had been some correspondence and it was settled the teacher was to live at the Walters' house. But Rita was mighty sweet to the stranger when she stepped from the westbound train, clad in brown, with a white felt hat on her soft blonde hair. And she took her away from Len with a laugh. Rita's father, the chairman of the committee, should meet her first. She would take her home to supper, and take her to Mrs. Walters' later.

Len stood and watched them pass down the street from the station. Just for a minute he had looked into Sidney's eyes and they had been diverting. In the weeks that followed they never lost that first charm for him. Twice a week he rode in from the ranch, and Sidney grew to look for the visits.

"My father was a ranger," Sidney told him. "I'm named for him. I was born in the forest, so I guess it's natural for me to feel at home there and love it best. That's why I wanted to come up here and teach school."

"Would you like to stay?" He blurted it out clumsily, but she did not seem to understand what lay behind his words. How could she know that he pictured her living out at the ranch, his wife, and all the world turned golden. Sidney shook her head doubtfully. Perhaps if she could go back East sometimes. Rita had told her how tiresome Kapper's Spur became. If her brother could come out and take up ranching, then she would like it.

"Send for him. I'll take him on with me," promised Len.

And the next few weeks Kapper's Spur thrilled at the small drama enacted under its very nose. Big Al Baxter, fresh from college, with a halfback record behind him, a sense of humor and plenty of good intentions, not only came on and went after ranching as if it had been trout fishing, but also after Rita Henty.

"The trouble with you western girls is that you're trying to be like eastern girls," he told her flatly. "Why don't you drop these latest style flubdubs and get into a short skirt and flannel waist and ride over to see us with Sid? After we're married, some day I'm going to teach you how to enjoy life."

"I wouldn't marry you for anything, Mr. Baxter," Rita told him teasingly. "Well, maybe not," said Al easily. "Did you know Len and Sid are engaged?"

"Really?"

"Certain sure," he nodded his head solemnly. "Last night. This big gold moon of yours does wonders. I saw how things were going as soon as I came West, so I rather hurried them up. Told Sid she'd have to go back with me; that I didn't like the place, or Len, or the ranch. If you want a girl to go a certain way, you pull the bridle opposite."

Rita's brown eyes flashed at the big, complacent fellow. He was so serenely sure of himself and his power to win. It was fearfully slow at the Spur. Somehow Miss Henty began to find interest in teaching the Easterner western ways. She was hospitable to him and comradely. The captain liked him, and Rita invited him to the house often. Sidney would not be married until spring.

"Then I'll be going back East," said Al.

"When?" She almost whispered it. Her back was turned from him. Not for worlds would she have let him see her eyes, filled with tears, after she had laughed at him and been so self-sufficient.

"Any day after the first wind of spring blows this way. Still, it's some time to wait till spring. I can't help looking forward, though. I'm going to be married in April, long about the 10th; that's my birthday."

"Perhaps she would rather be married on her birthday."

"When is it, Rita?"

She turned on him passionately. "I think you are the most—"

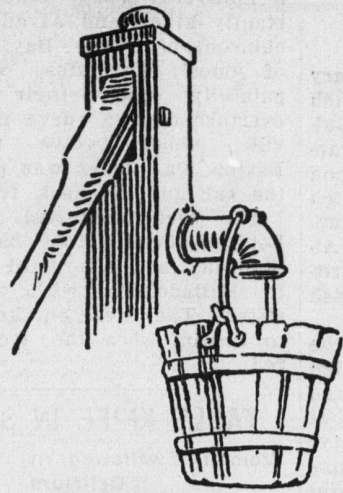
"No, you don't," he caught her up. "You've just been spoiled, that's all. Every able-bodied man in twenty miles wishes he had a fighting chance to win you, and I haven't wished. The first time I saw you I made up my mind to marry you. If you don't like April 10, make it your own birthday. I'll let you. I asked the captain and he told me to go ahead and win with his blessing. So I have."

Captain Henty came strolling leisurely up from the corral.

"I just heard about Len getting the schoolma'am," he called up. "You can teach if you want to, Rita."

"She's engaged, Cap." Baxter answered genially. He put out his hand as Rita tried to rise. "You'll have to advertise."

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