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## THE MATCHMAKER

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ELSIE'S dainty figure in blue muslin made a pretty picture framed by the old gnarled trunk

of the apple tree against which she leaned, with the wide-spreading branches of soft pink and white blooms, which fluttered on the grass as often as a faint breeze stirred. Elsie's pretty face, flushed as pink as the blossoms around her, was bent over her work.

"I love my love with a C, because he is charming," chanted brother Mark. "I hate him with a C, because he is chilling. His name is Charlie, and he comes from—"

"How I wish it was time for you to go to school again. Brothers are—"

"Now, don't swear, Elsie d-darling," yawned Mark as he rolled over on the grass and faced his sister with twinkling eyes. "He wouldn't like it, you know, or call you his 'angel' any more. Does he call you his angel, Elsie, or only his petting, darling little lamb?"

"I don't know who you are talking of or what you are talking of," replied his sister, stitching

turn her crimsoning cheek from Mark's sharp eyes.

"Don't talk farriddles," he responded coolly.

"You know perfectly well I mean that dear duck of a man, Charlie Graham. Isn't he a pet, Elsie? Isn't he a perfect—a perfect darling? I really must let him know how very, very dearly you adore him.

"Mark!" cried Elsie desperately. "Do be quiet!"

"I wonder what he will say," said Mark coolly, as he lay with upturned face. "He'll blush, of course, and then he will say—now what will he say, Elsie? And what will you give me not to tell him all about it?"

"You are the most exasperating boy that was ever born!" cried Elsie, her face aflame. "I wish—I wish—"

"Now that settles it," said Mark, still more tranquilly. "If you had spoken like a nice, decent little sister and given me that box of chocolates you've got hidden away, I might—well, I might have said nothing about it. Now however—"

Elsie collapsed. She knew Mark well enough to feel certain he was capable of carrying out his threat.

"You may have the sweets," she said humbly. "They're in the top drawer of my dressing-table, and—and Mark—"

Mark chuckled. "Poor little girl!" he said soothingly. "Thought I'd tell, did she? Never fear, Elsie, I'll be—what d'you call it?—magnanimous, see if I'm not."

With this cheering consolation he rolled himself over and over on the grass, and finally disappeared from view amongst the apple trees.

With a sigh of relief Elsie looked up, then as quickly down, for coming towards her through the orchard was Charlie Graham himself.

Elsie was absorbed in her work immediately;

indeed, her head was bent so low, and she was so oblivious of the approaching figure, that she positively jumped when a voice said close by:

"Good morning, Miss Hughes."

"Oh, how'd you do, Mr. Graham," she responded, aglow with innocent surprise and blushes. "You were the last person I expected to see."

He sat down opposite at the foot of a wide-branched old apple tree.

"I'm off to-morrow," he said rather jerkily. "I came to say good-by."

Elsie had quite recovered her self-possession now that she saw how far astray his had gone—how big and awkward, yet how manly and handsome, he looked as he sat there.

"Good-by?" she echoed, raising her big blue eyes to his in wonder. "Are you going away?"

"Got my orders," he answered, more jerkily still. "Two years' job in the Philippines, I fear. The regiment's ordered abroad, and they don't give one many days to pack one's trunk in it."

"It's horrid," she cried, her lip trembling. "It is too bad—I mean, you must hate going, Mr. Graham, so—so suddenly."

"Of course I do," he said miserably. "It's worse than hard luck, just now, and we are going to a bad station, I hear—unhealthy climate, impossible to—I mean its awfully rough on the married men."

She understood his meaning quite well, although he blundered and bungled over it frightfully. Elsie's cheeks were scarlet.

After all, what fools men were. As if she wouldn't much, much rather have him speak now and be engaged, although two years was a long time, and—

Well, she couldn't make him speak, for she knew Charlie Graham's somewhat fantastic ideas of honor.

"Ye—es," she said, in a weak little voice, which had a most maddening quiver in it. "It's very—hard luck—on them."

Altogether it was a very dreary, heart-sick pair that sat under the apple trees, when a sudden diversion changed brooding melancholy into alarm. Something between a reproachful moo and an angry bellow sent Elsie's eyes swiftly from her work. In an instant she was on her feet, wide-eyed terror written on her white face.

"The black e-cow!" she stuttered in horror. "Oh, Mr. Graham, w-what shall we do? It's—it's coming." Her tones rose to a shrill crescendo, as she clung to Charlie Graham's arm.

"Don't be frightened," he urged, laughing at her fears. "It won't hurt us; it's only—"

Somehow his arm had found its way round her waist, but she was too frightened just then to find any comfort in the fact.

"It'll run," she screamed. "It's—it's d-dangerous—we shall be k-killed! Oh! oh! it's coming! it's coming!"

Sure enough the black cow was showing no friendly symptoms of good-fellowship. She stood glaring at the two who stood facing her, and emitted from time to time a surly bellow.

The next few moments became a confused jumble of events to Captain Charlie Graham. He was aware of a small fleeting figure in blue muslin, which had slipped from his embrace, and of the on-coming of the black cow. He stood irresolute for a minute. The next he was flying in Elsie's direction in most unheroic flight, with the cow bellowing at his heels.

The chase was short but swift. The cow lost. Just as the poor, terrified little girl in blue, stumbling over a projecting root, gave herself up for lost with a despairing shriek, two strong arms caught her up and safely landed her on the other side of the fence, with the black cow bellowing in impotent rage at a comfortable distance. Though the

did not unloose their clasp. She was sobbing out her fear and he was kissing her hair, and every scrap of her face that he could reach, quite oblivious of the fact that he was going to an unhealthy foreign station for two years, and had decided that it would be most dishonorable to bind a beautiful girl like Elsie Hughes to an engagement for so long a time.

"My darling little girl," he kept whispering, as he held her closer to him.

Later on, Elsie, crumpled, tear-stained and happy, found herself waylaid by a grimy-faced, grimy-handed gamin, who grinned up at her in bare-faced mockery.

"My own darling precious," he gurgled, dancing an impromptu fling before her. "I say, I want more than those old sweets. Why, they're half gone. It's worth a dollar at least, and if you don't give it me I shall ask him."

"I don't know what you mean, you tiresome boy," retorted Elsie, drawing aside her skirts from his contaminating touch. "I do wish you would try and be at least clean. You look as if you had been up a chimney."

"Only the apple trees," Mark said coolly. First-rate seat—free—and it beat all the vaudeville I ever saw.

"Mark!" she cried again, reddening angrily. "Oh, don't bother!" he said sweetly. "If you won't shell out, I bet he will. It was really worth a dollar for the brilliance of the idea."

"I don't know what you are driving at, you silly little boy," she said irritably.

"Oh, it's all right," cried Mark. "It was only that I let the black cow into the orchard. I thought if that wouldn't bring him to the scratch nothing would—and, if I'm any judge, it did."