

## The Matchmakers

By  
Constance D'Arcy Mackay.

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It was during the first course that Helena Brent made her entrance, and all the boarders at Mrs. Pennington's table looked up with soup spoons suspended. The dingy background of the dining room wall heightened rather than diminished Helena's beauty. Against its dull tan and brown pattern her supple young figure stood like a brilliant bas-relief.

So Professor Macklyn thought as he looked at her quizzically from behind his steel rimmed eyeglasses. She was youth personified, and youth was at a premium at Mrs. Pennington's, where elderly bachelors and maiden ladies and middle aged married couples supped nightly on the viands Mrs. Pennington sparingly set forth.

Helena Brent was different from all these, and Professor Macklyn's own middle aged heart was going out to her in furtive sympathy when he caught the stealthy glance that little Miss Eustis sent to the other end of the table, where sat Ramsay Sturgis, the only young man in the house, a pleasant, frank eyed, broad shouldered fellow for whom Professor Macklyn had always felt an instinctive liking.

The professor's glance followed Miss Eustis and rested there, while Ramsay Sturgis imperturbably went on with his dinner, unaware of any hoverings of romance, for as the professor looked quickly away again his eyes for a second time encountered those of Miss Eustis, and in their depths he saw the light of a born matchmaker before her lids drooped and hid the tiny spark. She had a tender heart, this little Miss Eustis, in spite of her prim, spinsterly ways, and when the professor let himself into the chilly boarding house hall a few evenings later he found her there on guard.

From the parlor came sounds of a clear soprano voice, and presently another voice, undeniably masculine, joined in. Miss Brent and Mr. Sturgis were singing a college glee. Miss Eustis held up a warning finger.

"Don't disturb them," she begged. "It's so difficult to become really acquainted in a house like this, and they are getting on famously. She told me last night that they had discovered quite a number of mutual friends. They are both from the west, you know, and strangers to New York."

The professor disavowed any intention of entering the parlor and, leaping back against the wall, with his books balanced on one arm, listened contentedly to the music.

Miss Eustis listened too. Into the daily routine of her life had come something bright and vital, and her faded face glowed under the new impetus.

The professor likewise felt a sudden quickening impulse. There was a certain relish and novelty in playing the role of matchmaker. It occurred to him that he had kept too steadily to his books, and now a voice within him that he had long believed silent cried out for life and companionship. He turned to Miss Eustis.

"What do you think they'd say to a little theater party and oysters?" he demanded whisperingly.

Miss Eustis' eyes widened. She caught her breath.

"Why, professor," she gasped, "I didn't suppose that you—"

"Knew what the taste of a good time was? Well, I did once, but I've been a bookworm these many long years, and it's time I learned the flavor of festivity again."

It was a flavor for which Helena Brent and Ramsay Sturgis were both equally keen, and so a radiant party of four clambered down the slippery, sand strewn steps of Mrs. Pennington's boarding house into the crisp wintry starlit night.

Through the hardening process of uneventful years Miss Eustis had reached a dreary apathy concerning clothes, but as it dawned on her that the theater party was only the first of a long series of occasions when she would be forced to play the chaperon her wardrobe began to receive particular and minute attention.

Her hair was loosened from its severe little knob at the back of her neck and curled softly around her temples as it had not done since she was a girl. A stiff, uncompromising walking hat was replaced by a toque mysteriously composed of violets and tulle.

Nor was the professor to be left behind in his sudden orgy of fashion. His rusty overcoat gave way to a handsomely tailored garment of black. His loose, uncertain colored neckties were removed and succeeded by the crispest, most up to date adornments the haberdasher's window displayed.

"We owe it to our young people," he declared as he and Miss Eustis strolled through the park one February afternoon. A little way ahead of them walked Helena Brent and Ramsay Sturgis.

Every now and then Helena's laughter drifted back to them, mingling with Ramsay's happy tones. The young man's salary had been doubled within the month, and Helena had begun to embroider initials on certain flimsy muslin with a furious zeal.

The professor looked questioningly at Miss Eustis. "What do you think?" he queried.

"I don't think! I know!" she answered, and then added in evident trepidation: "But perhaps I oughtn't to have told you. I fancy the dear young things want to keep their secret a little while longer, and Helena hasn't

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spoken to me about it. But last night I couldn't help seeing it—there was a diamond ring on her bureau in a little white satin case."

The professor beamed. "And of course they'll go to house-keeping. Ramsay has always said that if he were married he'd have an apartment."

"There will be furniture to see to, and china and kitchen ware, but the dear children are so engrossed with their love affair that they haven't time for anything practical."

"We might look up the things beforehand, and then when the young people are ready give them the benefit of our superior wisdom," the professor suggested.

After that, on Saturday afternoons, he and Miss Eustis roamed to far parts of the city to furniture, china and picture stores and to brass shops down on the east side.

There were bookstores, too, where the professor reveled. What, he questioned, could give more cheerful aspects to a room than volumes of limp red leather and andirons of hammered brass. They even found an apartment which combined the amazing trilogy of cheapness, beauty and light.

It was when they were secretly rejoicing over this discovery that the bomb fell. Miss Brent accosted Miss Eustis at the hour of luncheon and candlesticks.

"I've come to tell you," she said simply, "that I'm going to be married."

"I knew it all along, dear," said little Miss Eustis, and kissed her. "The professor and I consider Mr. Sturgis a splendid fellow."

Amazed laughter broke in ripples across the face of Helena.

"Mr. Sturgis!" she cried. "Why, how perfectly funny! Didn't you know he was engaged to a girl out west? He told me so the first night I ever met him. And he knows my fiance, Mr. Holbrook. That's what we used to talk about when we went walking."

"Then you were nothing—over—but just—friends?" Miss Eustis' voice was very faint. She was wondering dimly how she was ever to break the news to the professor.

"Nothing but friends," echoed Helena Brent, and, with an odd little twitch of her lips, she bent and kissed Miss Eustis again.

At breakfast Miss Eustis intimated to the professor that she had something to tell him which was of supreme importance, and they sought the nearest avenue of the park.

Spring was in the land. The green grass was like a verdant shadow on the brown earth, and by the fountain's sparrows were twittering noisily. An ungovernable lump rose in Miss Eustis' throat. The only romance at which she had ever assisted was at an end. Briefly she told the professor, while he listened, agitated, disappointed and dismayed.

"Then it's all over?" he said.

"All over."

"And I had thought of them in their own home with all the things we chose around them."

"Oh, so had I!"

The professor looked at Miss Eustis. He had been realizing of late how pretty she had grown, with the delicate, fragile prettiness of a late summer rose.

It came to him with a sudden, startling wrench that he would miss their walks and drives as he had missed nothing else in his meager, lonely life. There rose before him the vision of the house that they had planned together. His hand closed over hers.

"Elizabeth," he said, "as matchmakers we're a distinct failure, unless you're willing to retrieve it by marrying me. For, after all, that house that we dreamed of is our house. Our hearts and souls went into it, not theirs!"

She had meant to light the flame for others. Instead it had been lighted for her. She gave the professor an illumined look.

"I believe it is so, John," she said softly. "But, oh," she added a moment later, "they'll say it was they, not we, who made the match!"

"Let them say!" returned the professor happily.

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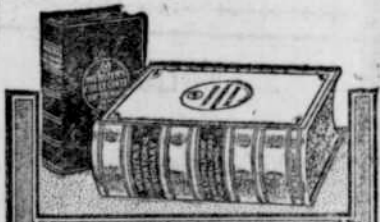
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