

A Tale of Two Matchmakers

~an Austen-inspired short story featuring Emma, Mr. Knightley & a fairy named Sylvia~

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They had just packed away the strawberry tartlets when Emma Woodhouse saw that garish Mrs. Elton headed her way, no doubt intending to jabber more about someone's excessively decorated barouche or the earthly utopia that was her beloved Maple Grove. Emma grimaced. Thankfully, Harriet—darling Harriet!—intercepted the woman, but Emma suspected the dear girl wouldn't be able to hold her off for long.

With a sense of urgency, Emma glanced around for both an escape route and, if possible, the opportunity to push Harriet more directly into the path of Mr. Frank Churchill. Later, perhaps, in appreciation for Harriet's sacrifice now, she could finally succeed in that task. Harriet and Mr. Churchill would suit perfectly. (Emma just knew it!) They needed only a little...nudge.

However, neither of these objectives seemed attainable at the moment, as Mr. Knightley had been keeping a rather watchful eye on her all afternoon. What an irritating gentleman he could be! Always parading his civility about like some other man would display a showy riding horse or a fancy waistcoat, and his relentless firmness with her was almost as tiresome as one of Miss Bates's speeches.

But, oh, look!

Mrs. Elton had managed to snag Mr. Knightley as well as poor Harriet into her discussion. Emma took a quick breath. Still, as unfortunate as that was for her dear friend and her scolding neighbor, she knew a good opportunity when she saw one.

She slipped into the nearby woods—unseen, thank goodness, by anyone of importance—and she marched around a little in delicious privacy, trying to shake off a most disconcerting feeling. Her irritation began and ended with Mr. Knightley, of course, at least primarily. She found herself muttering aloud, “Why must he always be so very meddlesome, irksome and—”

As she tried to think of another word, she was startled to hear a soft, lilting voice suggest, “Troublesome?”

“Why, yes! Exactly so,” Emma replied, turning around in place but not immediately spotting the

owner of the voice. “Er, hello?”

“Here,” the voice said.

Emma felt the curious sting of surprise (being shocked happened so rarely to her), especially when she discovered that the lilting voice belonged to none other than a fairy girl. One who was perched on the trunk of a chopped-down pine-tree and wearing a rather pretty ivory frock, if Emma did say so. Although it was not as pretty as Emma’s own.

She took a step back, but the little girl creature just crossed her tiny arms and sighed. “You are Miss Woodhouse, I presume?” she said, her tone vaguely bored.

“Indeed, I am,” Emma replied. “And you?”

“Miss Sylvia Grayson, second cousin of the Princess of the Faeries. Well, of the current ruling family, anyway. There’s been a bit of discord over the past two centuries and some say the throne should have gone to Marius of the Westleigh clan. But he has always been a little unstable and displayed appalling taste in social situations, so the Board of the Fates gathered together last July and—”

“What are you doing here?” Emma blurted. “In the woods?”

Sylvia sighed. “Oh. Why, I’m looking for diversion, of course. I truly despise fey politicking and the endless arguments that accompany it. I would much prefer to play at love.”

“You are looking to find a mate?”

The fairy girl laughed. “Dear heavens, certainly not! Why would I want to give up my independence? No, I merely wish to help others come together. I believe I am rather well suited to figuring out who might make a good pair.”

Emma warmed to the diminutive creature and smiled at these words. She prided herself on her own astuteness in matchmaking. The little fairy could hardly trump her skill, but it was so adorable that she aspired to similar goals.

Emma waved her hand at a break in the hedges where Sylvia might see the Box Hill picnickers at play. “Make a match for me,” Emma requested. “Who in this crowd just there—” She pointed. “Who would make a good couple?”

The fairy easily flew to a branch on a nearby tree to garner a better view. She stared with her tiny

bluish eyes most intently at the gathering before blinking three times and smiling at Emma. “I will give you more than you wish. Not one pair, but three. As I have now imagined them perfectly in my mind, the matches are bound to happen.”

Emma grinned. This ought to be delightful! “And your first pairing?”

“Your friend, Miss Harriet Smith. I see her with a tall, rugged gentleman who attends to her every word.” Sylvia glanced around. “I do not see him here at present, but I know him from my prior observations back at Highbury.”

Emma very nearly rolled her eyes. The fairy had to be talking about Mr. Churchill, of course. Although he was not precisely a “rugged” man, nor was he wandering about on the lawn as he had been when last she had seen him, Emma knew that she would meet with success once she set her mind toward bringing him together with her sweet friend.

“Well, that is hardly news,” she told Sylvia. “It is obvious Harriet belongs with a tall gentleman. I know just the one you mean, and I have thought so myself.” She nodded knowingly at the fairy. “Were my former governess here today, I would have told her the same thing.” Emma paused. “I made a rather successful match for her just last year, you know.”

“Yes. Miss Taylor and Mr. Weston,” Sylvia replied. “I remember that one. Quite impressive.”

“Why, thank you.” Emma beamed at the fairy girl. “So, then, am I to understand you have been watching us at home in Highbury for some time?”

“Politics are *dreadfully* boring, Miss Woodhouse. I seek amusement everywhere I can.”

“Oh, right. So, who is your second match?”

Sylvia bobbed her head in the direction of Jane Fairfax. “There is a gentleman here today that is perfect for her. A gentleman with whom she has a secret acquaintance.”

“Really?” Emma cried, most intrigued by this odd turn of circumstances. Had the mysterious man, who was secretly in love with Miss Fairfax despite marrying another (or so Emma had been told!), recently come into the area? Emma’s gaze darted around the lawn in hopes of being the first to spot the elusive Mr. Dixon. She detected, however, only the irritating Mr. Elton, the kind but rather old Mr. Weston, and the tall (and, perhaps, a *little* rugged) Mr. Churchill discussing something in the far distance. She dismissed them from her mind and continued searching for the long-lost love of Miss Bates’s mousy niece, sighing heavily when she could not locate anyone at all who looked remotely like an adulterous stranger.

Just as she was about to implore Sylvia to please point her in the correct direction, Emma heard a familiar voice bellowing, “Miss Woodhouse? Emma? Where are you?”

“Oh, such bad luck!” Emma said, her vexation not able to be contained. “It is Mr. Knightley,” she explained to the fairy, “and he shall be his usual scolding and cross self again if I do not rush out at once.” She glanced regretfully at Sylvia. “However, I very much enjoyed meeting you. Sorry not to be able to stay to hear your final match.”

The fairy girl smiled at her and gave a small curtsy.

“Emma!” Mr. Knightly called, more insistently this time. “Miss Woodhouse, please show yourself.”

Emma rolled her eyes and grinned one last time at Sylvia. “Goodbye,” she told the fairy before racing out of the woods.

Sylvia could hear Emma replying to her Mr. Knightley with an edge of temper, “I am here, sir. There is no need to shout so. You will frighten the forest creatures.”

“What on earth were you doing walking around in the woods by yourself?” he demanded.

“Just taking a refreshing stroll to clear my head of all the dreary conversations,” Emma said. “Really, Mr. Knightley, you can hardly blame me.”

He huffed. “You are forgetting your responsibility here and your position amongst the guests.” He picked a few leaves off her dress and brushed away a twig that had lodged itself onto the top of her bonnet. “Really, Emma. Take more care next time.”

And Sylvia, who was watching this scene clearly from her position on the tree branch, giggled into the shady atmosphere of the woods, unheard.

There went her Match #3.

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About the Author:

Marilyn Brant is a *USA Today* bestselling and award-winning author of eight novels to date, writing in the genres of contemporary women’s fiction, romantic comedy, and coming-of-age mystery. Recently, the Illinois Association of Teachers of English selected her as their 2013 Author of the Year.

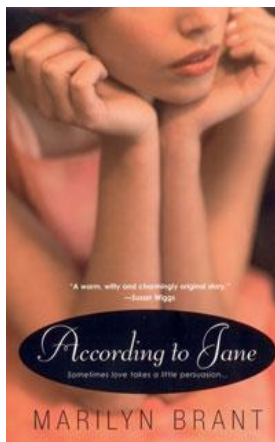
As a former teacher, library staff member, freelance magazine writer, and national book reviewer, Marilyn has spent much of her life lost in literature. Her books have been featured by the Doubleday Book Club, Book-of-the-Month Club, Literary Guild, BOMC2, and Rhapsody Book Club, and they've won awards such as the Romance Writers of America's Golden Heart, the Booksellers' Best, and the Aspen Gold Reader's Choice.

She lives in the Chicago suburbs with her family, reads a lot of Jane Austen, and loves chocolate, old movies, and road trips with music blaring and the windows rolled down. Please visit her online at <http://www.marilynbrant.com> or find her on [Goodreads](#), [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

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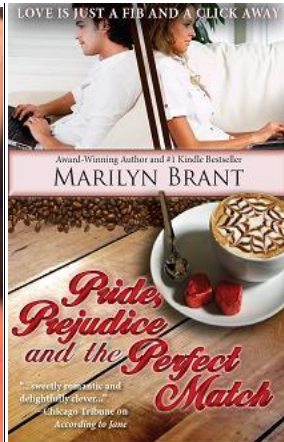
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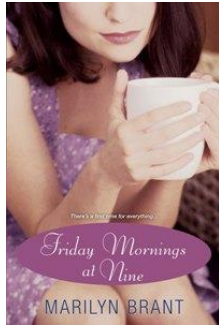
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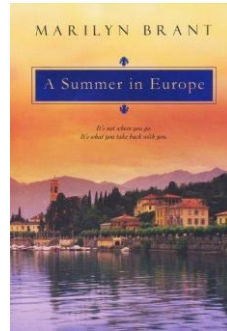
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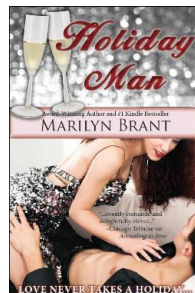
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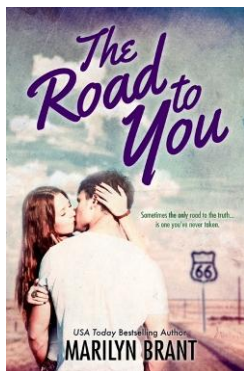


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