

SEVEN SISTERS

Mr Matthew Brown was taken under the wing of the motherly Mrs Sheila Crawford, Head of Department, when he arrived at St Cuthbert's Grammar to teach history. It was a new part of the country for him to reside in.

The pupils were keen to learn – that was why Matthew had chosen to come to a Kent grammar school and he'd left Leicestershire and the comprehensive far behind.

Matthew soon got to know Sheila Crawford and the other two members of the history department. He was amazed to learn that Sheila had seven daughters. He couldn't imagine being one of seven siblings himself, seeing as he was an only child.

A couple of weeks into his first term Sheila invited him to have supper at her home.

Matthew was elated; it wasn't just the hope of a good home cooked meal but he was intrigued to meet her family, especially the seven sisters!

Ollie the English teacher whom Matthew had befriended and spent spare time with was quite envious. They were both shy, nerdy sorts and approaching 30, and their thoughts were increasingly turning to the question of how to find a wife. "You lucky beggar, seven girls to choose from" ribbed Ollie. "I don't yet know how old they are" countered Matthew. Matthew purchased a box of chocolates from the village shop and made his way along the country lanes to Sheila's. The house looked old, enormous and rather ramshackle.

"Come in, come in", ushered Sheila, and as he entered the farmhouse style kitchen Matthew's senses were assaulted by the cacophony of noise, the cooking aromas, and seven rather lovely young women.

The sisters were stirring pans, singing, playing cards, and even petting rabbits who appeared to be wearing dresses.

"Girls, girls!" shouted Sheila above the din, "I want to introduce Matthew Brown to you – my new colleague." The girls paused in their activities and scrutinised Matthew.

"Matthew, this is Ann our eldest and then there's Belle, Clare, Dee, Eva, Fay, and Gail. Yes they're in alphabetical order by age as it helps me and Mr Crawford remember them all."

At that moment a rotund gentleman with a large moustache entered the farmhouse kitchen - "Roland meet Matthew our new history teacher" and Matthew shook his hand.

Matthew was given the armchair by the fire and surveyed the scene. There was a riot of colour everywhere he looked – rich dark paints on the walls, colourful curtains, tablecloth and china, and the variety of hues worn by the girls. It was all at such odds with his parents' three-bed urban semi where everything was beige including his mother's outfits. Supper was soon on the table and it was a lively affair as Roland was generous with his homemade wine to Matthew, Sheila and the four eldest girls over 18. The beef stew followed by apple crumble was all very tasty and Matthew began to warm to this happy family.

The girls joshed and teased each other as well as their parents. There were feisty debates on politics, and questions of Matthew. He deflected those and asked enough of them to understand that Ann was a nurse, Belle a primary school teacher, Clare a shop assistant, and Dee secretary to her father who Matthew now realised was a well known writer of historical novels. Eva, Fay and Gail hadn't yet finished their education.

After supper the girls vied for Matthew's attention.

"Come and play table tennis in the games room!"

"Come and see our goats!"

Matthew diplomatically agreed to look at the goats before making for the games room.

He'd played a lot of table tennis but these were competitive girls who each tried in turn to beat him.

Downstairs, Sheila was in Mrs Bennett mode, *Pride & Prejudice* being her favourite novel. She mused to Roland that maybe Matthew might prove suitable for one of their daughters.

Roland was rather indifferent, loathe to change the status quo although he knew it had to happen.

As the evening drew to a close the seven sisters asked Matthew to visit again. He looked to Sheila who smiled warmly. He wanted to return as soon as he could.

When Ollie caught up with Matthew the following day he was keen to know how Matthew had got on and whether he could introduce one of the sisters to him.

Matthew and Ollie hatched a plan: they scoured all the local events and invited the girls to join them at quiz nights, barn dances, rambles, etc. Both men increasingly enjoyed the company of the seven sisters who usually came en masse as not one of them liked to be left out.

As the year wore on, Christmas festivities were held, Winter turned into Spring and then with the lengthening evenings of Summer there were more opportunities for outdoor sports and activities.

The girls became like sisters to Matthew and to Ollie. They much appreciated the fun and friendship.

But did either of the young men choose a wife among the seven sisters you might wonder. It was more a case of the sisters choosing the men! Ann the nurse was drawn to Matthew and Belle the primary school teacher was drawn towards Ollie. They engineered some double dates and in due course engagements and joyous weddings followed.

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