

Allison's Garden.

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"Every chair weighs a ton," I assured her, "and the ceilings are low."
 "And the rugs?"
 "All Turkish, and old. And there's an open fireplace in every room."
 "Nothing Frenchy, or gilded?"
 "Nothing."
 "I'm glad. I never could accept the house if it were gilded."
 "I've got five Collies and a Persian cat," I volunteered.
 "I love Collies and Persian cats," she said. Then she looked at me with a frank, merry smile. "What is your name?" she asked.
 "John," I answered meekly.
 "There was never such a fine, old, honest name as John," she said. "But I'm sure your other name isn't Smith. What is your other name, John?"
 "It is Brooke, my dear. And yours?"
 "Allison, John—Allison Cornwall."
 "Will you hand me that watch of ours, Allison? I am going to open it. There! what is it you see?"
 "Why, it is my picture, John! I suppose it is unusual, but it seems so natural that it should be there."
 "I found it in the studio of a friend who died."
 "My Cousin Robert?"
 "Yes. I was his executor. In his will he said that I was to take whatever pleased me most from his studio, and I chose your picture. Since then I have tried so hard to find you, and behold! to-day you have strayed into my garden, as you strayed into my heart two years ago."
 "So you knew me, John?"
 "The moment I saw you, Allison."
 "And you meant all that about my consenting to marry you before I left the garden?"
 "I was never so serious in my life. I was bold then, dear, but I am timid now; I want so much to ask you to do something, and I hardly dare. I said I would not let you leave the garden till you had promised to marry me; now I want your promise to marry me before you leave the garden—your garden—our garden. It isn't as if I had met you only to-day, Allison; I have loved you for two years—two long, long years."
 "I will consider it. And now I will give you the keys to the house, and you will go and order luncheon; I couldn't marry you till I'd seen the house, you know."
 "Is the house so important?"
 "We must like the same things, John," she answered simply. And then I understood.
 Leaving Allison in the wistaria-arbor, I ran to the house, burst in upon my honest old housekeeper, Mrs. Perkins, and ordered luncheon for two. Never had the question of luncheon loomed so importantly. "I must order what she likes," I thought.
 Mrs. Perkins was greatly amazed and equally patient. I asked her to suggest dishes, and as quickly vetoed her choice; I made wild suggestions myself, which I as promptly rejected. There was but one way for me, and, after all, wasn't that the test? I ordered just the sort of luncheon I liked: broiled squabs, artichokes, fresh butter, strawberries from the garden, with bar-sugar and a whopping pitcher of cream, and a pot of my own special brand of Ceylon tea.
 Mrs. Perkins rose manfully to the occasion; the squabs were in the larder, the artichokes in the ice-box, and Allison and I would pick the strawberries ourselves.
 With luncheon promised in an hour, contingent upon the delivery at the kitchen door of the strawberries, I left Mrs. Perkins and made a hurried tour of the house. It was a most encouraging tour; every room was clean and orderly, yet had that indefinable air of being lived in. I looked last and longest at the library—my own particular retreat. It was as characteristic of me as was my garden, and if Allison loved my garden, surely she must love my library! Satisfied with my survey, and thankful that I had been born with an abundance of lace window curtains and gilded chairs, I hastened to the garden.
 Allison was sitting where I had left her, in the wistaria-arbor. I felt that she had always been there, a part of my life, the spirit of my garden, the joy of my house and heart. We wandered to the strawberry bed hand in hand, and while I picked berries, she with deft fingers, constructed small baskets of leaves. Then with our spoils we journeyed gleefully to the kitchen door.

With Mrs. Perkins, as with myself, it was a case of love at sight. Allison was whisked away from me and tucked under my worthy housekeeper's metaphysical wing almost before I knew it. I then fled to my bedroom, where, as I remember, I changed my tie four times and agitatedly smoothed my hair with a clothes brush. That accomplished I ran downstairs to the library where Allison, conducted thither by Mrs. Perkins, soon joined me.
 "Oh, John, I do love your house!" she said.
 "Our house," I corrected.
 "Well, 'our' house, then."
 "You haven't really seen it yet," I warned.
 "There never was a dearer room than this," she replied, surveying the book-lined walls with appreciative eyes. "There is nothing so cozy as books I think, when they are not too new or too oppressively expensive-looking."
 "The World's Best Literature, eighty volumes, bound in calf," I suggested, or "Masterpieces of Fiction, half morocco, edited by a Justice of the Supreme Court and a Senator from Kansas."
 "Yes," she smiled, "that's it. Was there ever anything so stupid!"
 "There never was. But I'm as hungry as can be. Let's trot along to the dining-room and see what we can find to eat."
 "Perhaps luncheon isn't ready."
 "Luncheon is always ready at two o'clock. This house seems to run itself, dear; as sure as I pull into the dining-room on schedule I find a meal staring me in the face. Let us hope that your first meal in your—our—house will please you."
 "I'm sure it will," she beamed.
 And it did. Wasn't it nice of her to like squabs and artichokes and sweet butter? Wasn't it dear of her to praise my brand of tea and to eat two saucers of strawberries? We were very gay and happy, and we chattered away like magpies till my eyes rested on the clock.
 "You must excuse me, Allison," I said, taking out a pencil and notebook, "but time is flying and there is much to be done. What is your age, dear?"
 "Is it important, John?"
 "Yes, dear."
 "Twenty-four, John."
 "And you were born?"
 "In Philadelphia, John."
 "And your father's name?"
 "Was Roger Courtland Cornwall, John, and mother's was Sarah Marshall."
 "Thank you, dear. Would you mind if I left you for an hour? It will take me all of an hour to run over to Belmont and get a marriage-license, a minister, and a wedding ring. You shall be married with the ring that was my mother's; she would have liked that, Allison."
 "But, John, I haven't told you I would!"
 "You like the house, and you like your luncheon, and you love the garden. Now there is only me to consider. Won't I do, Allison?"
 She looked at me very gravely, searching my face—my soul, perhaps—to see if there was aught in me that she could not accept.
 "Yes, John, you'll do," she said. "only it's lucky for you I'm an orphan. I never could do it if I weren't, you know."
 "I know," I said. "But one thing before I start for town—I hope you don't dislike automobiles, Allison."
 "I adore them, John."
 "How fortunate! There is a four-cylinder waiting for me this minute at the side door. I shall be back by four if I possibly can. It is only an eight-mile spin all told, and if I'm luck enough to catch a parson—is there any brand you prefer, dear?"
 "No, John, only the Episcopal kind look so sweet in their vestments."
 "You shall have the best I can get in the time I have," I promised. Then I rang for Mrs. Perkins and told her there was to be a wedding in the garden at half-past four or thereabouts. When it was made clear to her who the bride was to be, the dear-old soul really looked pleased.
 "I will leave Miss Cornwall in your hands," I told her. "She will like to explore the house, perhaps, or stroll in the garden, but in no circumstances is she to run away. She may repent of her decision and try to escape, but don't let her, Mrs. Perkins—don't you dare to let her!"
 Allison laughed merrily. I blew her a kiss, then flew through the house out of a side door, and hopped up be-



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