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Gertrude Came to Cherry Valley

BY FRED J. ST. JOHN

CHAPTER II.

"Well, here's the point: I don't want to lose my good looks but I should lose them if I worked the way Mrs. Andrews does, for instance. Fess up now! Wouldn't you hate to see me all worn out and old-looking? Wouldn't you rather have me grow into a beautiful old lady?"

By this time they had left Cherry Valley far behind and the lights of the city began to twinkle before them.

Presently John captured one of the slim white hands which did not propose to grow "wornout and old-looking."

"Little Girl! We've talked this over lots of times but I never saw things just as you have stated them until now. I don't see how this farm-work problem—for the women—is to be worked out but—I'll tell you! Come out to Cherry Valley, and be a farmer's wife. We can solve the thing together and when we do, the credit and the glory shall all be yours."

"No!" Her lips went white but she spoke firmly. "It might not work out and I'd just be one more woman sacrificed. Much as I love you, John, I'm afraid it will have to be—all worked out—beforehand."

"But how?" he demanded, helplessly, a cloud of despair darkening the love-light in his eyes.

She looked at him for a moment, then said, as the car drew up at her door, "You'll have to find that out for yourself, John."

"All right! When I come again you'll see."

The weeks passed. John made an occasional trip to town but did not see Gertrude nor did he take any part in the social activities of the city. But he kept thinking and planning, trying to find the key which would open the door to his happiness. One day when he was going through an accumulation of farm journals he found one which some friend evidently had marked and passed on for his inspection. A whole page in this magazine was filled by an enthusiast, a writer who endeavored to show how life on the farm would be revolutionized by the general use of labor-saving equipment.

John read the article three times. Then he wanted to talk with some one. Suddenly he thought of his old classmate, Billy Randall, now a successful architect. When he called, Billy was in and greeted him wholeheartedly. They had a good chat over old times and then John showed his hand.

"How can I make old Cherry Hill over into a modern, up-to-date home?" he asked.

"Just listen to him!" shouted Billy. "Buried for months out in the wilds—hasn't been seen on a city pave for nobody knows how long—and now he wants a modern house! This must have something to do with a certain young lady for whom you were once believed to have more than a passing regard. Eh?"

John reddened but kept his counsel.

"Well, old chap!" continued his friend. "Tell me what's up. You're probably thinking about getting married. Some women do want a lot, as I find every day in my experience. Never mind your experience," interrupted John, "I don't expect to pay anything extra for that. It's a modern house I'm after."

"Oh, very well," answered Billy, "now that the point is settled, I don't mind telling you that you don't need an architect. You need a plumber and an electrician. The modern house," he went on seriously, "depends for its modernity on its system of heating, lighting and power. You will want to keep your big fireplace of course. That is a feature in itself. Then put in a modern heating system, hot air, water or steam, as you choose."

"Next comes the matter of lighting, natural and artificial. The natural lighting is accomplished by making the most of the daylight by means of windows, openings between rooms, interior decorations, tints and tones and that sort of thing. For your artificial lighting you'll want the latest thing in electricity, of course, I think I've heard you say that there's no water power available at your place? Well, you can have a small isolated electric plant that furnishes its own power. This will give you light all over the place. Then comes the mat-

ter of a pressure pump for your water system. Your electric plant furnishes the power. If you are going to have any consideration for the lady in the case you will arrange to use this same electric power to operate the washing machine, churn, a vacuum cleaner and a few other little tricks like that. In outline, that is about what is needed to create the Eden you think you are going to have out there in the bushes. By the way, old top, don't you want to commission me to watch the lady for you while you are camping out there in the hills? You mustn't think she's been pining at home while you've been in retreat. Gertrude Allison's having the time of her young life, believe me!"

John flinched but his voice was cool. "I'm glad to hear it," he said. "Well, I must be going. Just put these things down on paper for me, will you? You know more about it than I do. I'll be a pretty good customer if you want one."

Randall plunged into the plans for renovating Cherry Hill and John gave him a free hand. He had commenced the work with a rather heavy heart, for Billy Randall's hint that Gertrude was having a better time than usual had proved somewhat disquieting. He tried to banish the thought but he could not forget about a certain Doctor Barker, an old admirer of Gertrude's. This disquieting sensation somewhat lost its keenness as he got into the thick of his remodeling and by the time the last touches were administered, his chief feeling was that of pride in what he had accomplished and of desire to show it to Gertrude to receive her glad approval.

He had left the big living-room fireplace, as Billy had suggested, and had put in an adequate modern heating system. As to lighting, he had enlarged two windows, made a wide arch between the living room and dining room and otherwise taken care of what his friend had called the "natural" lighting effects. He had the house, barn, verandas and out-buildings wired for electricity. The lighting plant furnished electric lights equal in quality and convenience to those found in any modern city home. Following Billy's further suggestion, he put in a pressure pump with power to force water to all the buildings. He piped the water to the kitchen where a white enameled sink was placed and to the wash-house nearby, where stationary tubs were conveniently arranged. On the second floor of the house was the bathroom, tiled and fitted out in a manner to delight the most exacting housewife. The house was decorated after a scheme laid out by Billy and adopted only after John had gone over it carefully.

When all was done, John walked about the old home in a dream. Then he braced himself and turned his car cityward.

Upon reaching the city a voice hailed him. It was Billy Randall.

"Well, Old Pal! how is the new Eden coming along?"

"All through," said John, his voice showing his deep satisfaction. "Now ain't that too bad?" asked Billy of nobody in particular. "Here he's gone and fixed it all up pretty to show to his girl and when he comes rushing to town after her she's up and gone off with another man!"

"So?" John tried to conceal his disappointment as he asked, "Who's the lucky party?"

"Doc Barker. I saw them drive past her not five minutes ago. And it's getting to be a regular thing. You can see them almost every day. I don't see how Doc takes care of his practice, supposing he's got any. I reckon, though, he can afford to let it go to some fellow that needs it. Doc's got money, you-know."

John did not call at Gertrude's home and after discharging an errand or two, drove home with a heavy heart. The reaction from his hope and elation plunged him deep into gloom. He was ready to believe that the girl had found the prospect of life on a farm too forbidding and so had no place in her heart for him and Cherry Valley.

And what of Gertrude all this time? At first she thought John would appear again shortly, perhaps with no reference to his promise. Then she believed he was really trying to work out the way he had de-

clared he would find. When he did not appear, she gave up trying to find a reason for his action and, covering up the real ache in her heart, went on as usual with the social activities which the customary demands of her life made upon her.

Dr. Barker had long been her admirer and now improved the opportunity offered by John's absence. Gertrude made no attempt to analyze her own action but went about with apparent enjoyment of the doctor's society.

On a sunny day in April in fact the day following John's trip to the city, the doctor came to take her for a drive. He proposed that they drive into the country.

"We'll go out through Cherry Valley," she decided promptly, when he asked her which way they should drive into the country.

As they whirled along she thought of the last trip she had taken over the same road with John, on that gorgeous October day. Dear old John! Her heart was sore at his neglect. Had he stayed away all these months puzzling over some silly plan to satisfy her fussy ideas? And suppose he did not find the way he sought? What then?

The doctor called her attention to the flight of a flock of crows, over a group of substantial farm buildings that stood in a grove of splendid trees at the head of the valley.

Gertrude looked earnestly but not at the crows, for over there was John's place, Cherry Hill Farm, and the man who watched them from the big front veranda was John himself. She had almost yielded to an impulse to wave at him when the automobile skidded, struck a pile of stones and half-thawed earth, toppled and crashed over against the fence.

(To be continued.)

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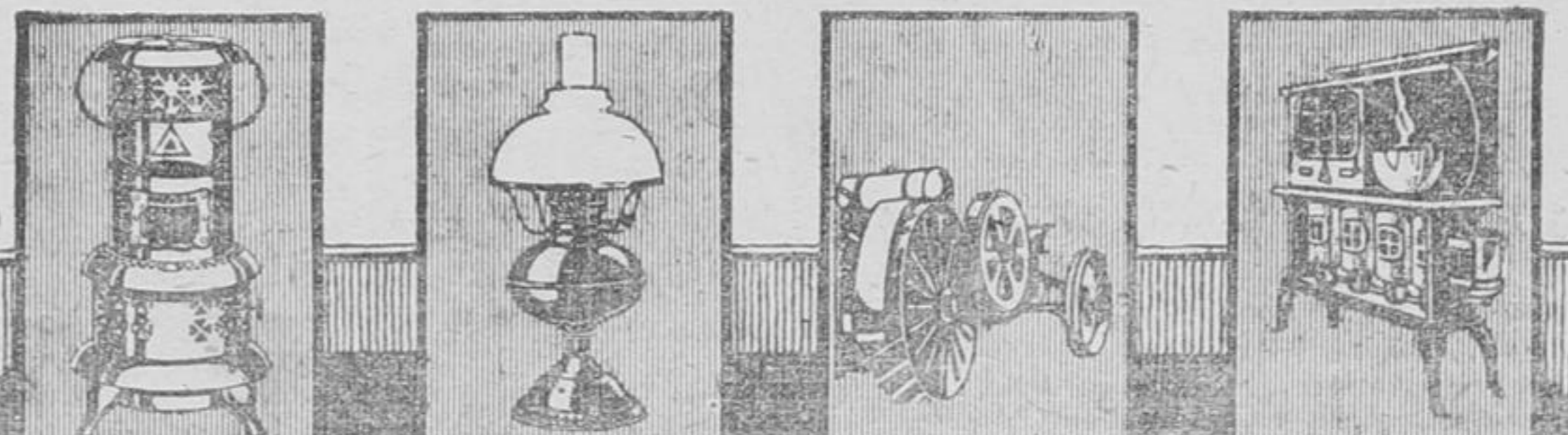
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