

IN MAGGIE'S GARDEN

hope they'll be nice," said Celia, thoughtfully biting her corset-needle, and looking through the porch-vines toward the next house. "They won't be," said Maggie, sitting her pretty foot from the railing on which she was perched. "I'm certain of it; and besides, Celia, what if they are? It isn't likely they'll have much to do with us. Anybody rich enough to buy the Mouton House associating with the poor little dot of a house next door? Oh, no!" Maggie spoke with calm conviction, and an entire absence of independence. She was a sensible and independent little person. Celia was watching the unloading of a cart at their new neighbor's gate. "I am afraid they are awfully rich," she admitted. "They've unpacked some of the things out of doors, and the furniture is lovely—push and stamped leather, and cherry bed-room sets; and they've a grand piano."

The old man raised his head at this juncture, and looked at her. Maggie looked sternly into his stern little eyes. "I want to ask you, sir," she said, with severity, "about your hens. They're ruining my tomatoes as fast as they can, and I've worked over them all summer; and we can't afford to lose them. Won't you—" She stopped—not because she had finished, but because Mr. Tidale, after a blinking inspection of her, had turned about and gone on heaving without a responsive syllable. Maggie's face burned hotly; her pretty lips trembled. "If I were a man!" she murmured, with her little brown hands clenched. "How can he? What does he mean by it? The beast!" The cackling in the tomato patch had reached a triumphant pitch, and a fresh flock had wandered through the fence. Maggie forgot Mr. Tidale. The hack was coming down the street from the noon train, laden with passengers; but she cared not for the observation of hack passengers, nor, for the matter, of kings and queens. She seized her white, beruffled apron in her trembling hands and rushed toward the garden. There was a wild cackling, a frightened peeping of little yellow balls, and a frenzied scattering. "Shoo—shoo!" cried Maggie, her voice unsteady with indignation and approaching tears. "Shoo!" If the hens were alarmed and temporarily routed, the brilliantly-tinted, sulky-eyed rooster was not. He stood motionless on the spot where Maggie's onslaught had found him—motionless save for a rising, and a swelling, and a trembling of his gay red comb, while his eyes grew sidler. Maggie shook her apron with cyclonic energy. "You impudent old thing!" she cried, the laughter struggling through her tears, and charged upon him valiantly. She felt a sudden twirl in the air, an angry upraising of yellow legs and bright feathers, and she put her hands to her face with a little scream. A sharp peck came down on her fingers; she heard his fluttering wings in the air, close at her face. She lowered her head into her apron, and fought at him with one courageous fist. And then she heard rapid striding steps, and a rattling crash through the dry bean-vines, then there was a pan-stricken squawk, checked in its first stage, a flapping of wings, and silence. Maggie took her head out of her apron. It was as though her fairy godmother—if she had one—had been at work. Mr. Tidale's rooster lay on the ground in an expiring flutter, his sheeny neck twisted, his warlike eyes forever dulled. And close at her side, anxious and agitated, and withal most attractively nice-looking, stood a strange young man in a well fitting, travel-stained suit, and a soft travelling-cap. Fallen among the tomato-vines were a cane and umbrella, strapped together. "Are you hurt?" he said. "He had taken out his handkerchief, and was pressing it to her hand, on which the blood had started. "I saw it from the hack, you see, and I lost no time in getting over. Do you think your hand is hurt?" "No," said Maggie, bewilderedly. "But she was not quite dazed. She saw that the hack had stopped at the Tidale's gate, and that a trunk was unloading from it. He had come on a visit; a relative, perhaps. She felt a thrill of regret at that. "No," she said, gratefully; "it was just a peck. How very good in you! and look at your handkerchief!" "My handkerchief!" said the young man, reproachfully. For Maggie, her pretty brown face flushed and her eyes softly smiling, looked very sweet, despite her rumpled hair and wrinkled apron; and there was something more than mere polite concern in the young man's pleasant eyes. He took her arm, still anxious, and led her to an upturned box at the edge of the garden. There was room for them both, and they both sat down. "Thank you! I do feel a little queer. I was frightened," Maggie admitted. "And—I can't thank you enough for your goodness. What should I have done! I think he really meant to kill me—and just because I wanted him to go home!" He joined in her laugh, reassured by her bright tines. "Home!" he repeated. "What! next door?" Maggie nodded. "They have so many chickens, and they're all so fond of my tomatoes." They laughed. Somehow they felt as though they had been acquainted a long time. "I must see to that," said the young man, decisively. "I'll speak to Wilson about it. He must have a park built, certainly." "Wilson?" said Maggie, timidly. "My man—gardener, or what you please—he does a little of everything,"

he explained, smiling. "They came on ahead, you know—is your hand better?—he and the housekeeper—to get things a tled a little. Why, you didn't think," he queried, studying her puzzled face, "that they owned the house—that they were the people?" He could not help laughing. And he took a card from his pocket-book, and gave it to Maggie, getting up to bow with burlesque formality. It bore the name of Harlan C. Tidale. "Yes—yes, we did!" said Maggie, rather faintly. "Mercy, I'm so glad!" And then she blushed, and could have bitten her tongue; but Mr. Tidale looked delighted. "I—you see, he was so horrid," Maggie explained, confused. "I spoke to him about the fence, and he wouldn't even answer me; he didn't pay the slightest attention." "Oh, Wilson! Did he have his ear-trumpet?" said Mr. Tidale. "Er—trumpet? No," said Maggie, wondering what was coming next. "Oh well, he's awfully deaf!" her new neighbor observed, with twinkling eyes. And they both laughed again, he gaily, she bewilderedly, and both shy with enjoyment. "My mother came with me; we're all the family," said Mr. Tidale, hastily, as Maggie, half-frightened at the old, new pleasure in her heart, rose. "You must come over and see her. You're sure you're not hurt?" "Very sure," said Maggie, flushing under his eager eyes. And she put her hand trustfully into the one he held out to her. "I was mistaken, Celia," said Maggie, when she sat down, with restored coolness, at the dinner-table; "they are very nice, indeed, the Tidales—the Tidale."

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