

welcome

Meant to Be

The lucky ones know what it means to look up at a dreary cocktail party, drink melting in hand, napkin stuck to your nervous skin, and see across the crowded room one person who makes your heart trade places with your head. There he is, the True Love. The luckiest ones discover Ever After.

The rest of us get to fall in love with things. But the lessons we learn in the material world aren't lost in the spiritual world. (If that is, indeed, where love resides. I think it is equally at home in the kitchen, the living room, the bedroom. . . .) Bear with me. One day, my sister and I were taking a walk in the country and we saw a For Sale sign on a house where the day before there had been none. I bought the house, even though I wasn't planning on buying one; I had recently discovered the concept of mortgages and felt the world was mine. The house had many rotten places, which was why I could afford it. But one of my favorite things to do is to bring out the best in something (or someone)—frankly, I feel that is the meaning of a well-lived life, a life of striving for the best.

Anyway, one place that needed immediate attention was the bathroom, as the shower stall was so corroded that it was falling to the floor below. Since all of this was taking place in a tiny town in Rhode Island, my decorating choices were limited. But there was, improbably, a tile store down the street. After looking at all the samples hanging on the walls, I noticed a couple of tiles in a box on the floor. They were beautiful, cut from stone from China, of a soft, green color, striated with white veins, and they had been left in their rough state. The owner of the shop explained that they were left over from a “fancy building job” that had recently been completed; we counted the tiles, and there were just enough to cover the floor of my new bathroom. I bought them.

Two years later, my sister, so beloved that she is almost my twin, decided to buy a house in the same town. She began reviewing real estate announcements, and from time to time she would send me out to assess various properties. Nothing was right, until one day we heard about a large house overlooking the mouth of the river, a house that had been designed by the firm Arquitectonica. My sister sent me out to scout. The moment I drove up, I knew I had found her house. I simply

recognized it. It had the right sort of flair, and openness, and it was interesting in exactly the way Nicole would love. I walked in the door, turned to the realtor, and said, “This will do.”

The realtor took me through the rooms. We arrived at a large master (mistress!) bathroom, and, as I opened the door, I had the oddest sensation of familiarity. For there, on the walls and floors, was the soft green Chinese stone that I loved. My own bathroom, a mere three miles away, was made of the leftover pieces from this house. It was meant to be.

I have just finished reading—and dreaming through—a wonderful book about Newport called *Private Newport: At Home and in the Garden*, by Bettie Bearden Pardee. Newport is a private place, like all the places I love, but this book lets us steal a glance into its world. One of the stories is about a statue of a lead peacock that once had pride of place on a pedestal in a grand garden but was washed out to sea by a devastating hurricane in 1954. The owner of the house eventually sold the property to a couple who set about refurbishing it. Forty-five years after the hurricane the original owner was invited to a party at the house. She was stunned to see, as she toured the newly laid-out gardens, that the very same lead peacock she had lost was once again preening on its pedestal in the garden. “Where did you find that sculpture?” she asked her hosts incredulously. “Oh, it was thrown up on the lawn during a storm,” answered the hosts.

Some things are meant to be. They simply feel right. You recognize, without even thinking about it, that you belong together. True love in love; a sculpture on the lawn; a house and its chate-laine. A wise man said to me once, “You know, love doesn't have to be such a struggle.” It took me a long time to understand what

he was saying, but now I see it. There is a virtue in ceding control, in letting go, in turning things over, allowing things to come to you, whether it is the perfect house, or the perfect stone, or the perfect sculpture, or the perfect love. What matters is to take hope; if we are open, each of us is given something that was meant to be. May your holidays be filled with love. May you cherish everything—and everyone—sent your way.



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