

There was a moment of silence. The cedars hid them from the group ahead. "Alice," he said slowly, "I took up that poor fellow simply because I knew I hadn't any show when the other men came. There wasn't anything else for me to do but play the saint."

"Don't," she said.

"There was one pitiful thing," Preston began, reaching for a bit of cedar, for they were standing still: "he said he had been half over the world alone, hunting for a chance of life, but he'd never had any one turn in and look after him, in a sort of friendly way. It made me ashamed, Alice, to think I began doing it to pass time." He put his hand to his vest. "He gave me his watch," he added.

Alice took the watch and looked at it a long while, tenderly. "To add to your collection," she said at last, returning it with a sad little smile. "Did he give you anything else, Tom?"

He looked at her questioningly a moment, but she would not meet his eyes. "Alice," he said, keeping the hand that had just given him the watch, "do you honestly mean it, dear?"

The crows circled over the cedars and the shadows deepened. "I—I mustn't let him kiss me again," some one whispered in the muffling folds of a flannel coat; but nobody—neither the crows nor Preston—overheard.

* * * *

Lorraine met Preston on the veranda. "The girls gave me some keepsakes for you when they went away," she said. "Kitty and Nannette left you some photographs and Mabel wrote in the poetry book for you, and—and you can have my sunbonnet—but it's faded. I don't know what Alice is going to give you, but—"



"DO YOU HONESTLY
MEAN IT?"

Preston smiled happily. He was touched at the little way the girls had chosen to show him that he could count them as friends among his souvenirs. He looked across to Alice, who was smiling, too.

"I am very rich in keepsakes," Preston said.

Marguerite Tracy.



HER WEDDING EVE.

As the maid of honor was a girl, and pretty, and had come some three hundred miles to assist her best friend through the trying ceremony of getting married, it was evident that she must have some place to sleep. It was just as evident, since the wedding was to be an early one and held at the bride's country home, that every available bed and sofa and divan

had been taken by the ten bridesmaids and numerous relatives and cousins, to say nothing of the rest of the bridal party, and that there was nowhere to store her away except in the small brass bed along with the bride.

"Aren't you feeling terribly scared and queer?" inquired the maid of honor, opening one of those confidences so dear to the heart of girls.

The bride, however, was unresponsive, and sleepily murmuring something about "it being after twelve," turned her back

Kathy—very! Kathy, who was to be married on the morrow and to—Dick! If it had been any one but Dick! She only hoped she could get through the day without breaking down. She hoped—The faint wandering moonbeams creeping into the room sought out the white bed and the still figures of the girls, and retreated awed by the shadows reflected in the maid of honor's eyes.

She awakened with a start, with the consciousness of having slept a long time and that she was alone. She put forth



"AREN'T YOU FEELING TERRIBLY SCARED AND QUEER?"

on her friend. The maid of honor kept up a steady flow of conversation until a slight snore awoke her to the uselessness of expending further breath. She leaned over the bride, whose eyes were closed and who was breathing regularly. Then she looked straight ahead of her into space.

"Well, if that doesn't beat all! Talk about calmness! There's no romance in a bride nowadays."

She felt distinctly grieved and disappointed that the last night of their intimate girlhood life was to be cut short thus. She thought it inconsiderate of

her hand toward the opposite pillow. Kathy was not there. Then she sat bolt upright in bed. Through the door that led into Kathy's little "den" she caught the faint flicker of a candle and glow of the firelight on the wall. Wide awake now, she crept out of bed. Her footsteps made no sound on the thick carpet. Passing into the other room, she found what she had expected—Kathy!

"What under heaven—" she began, then paused in the doorway.

Kathy looked up, startled. She was crouching before the open grate fire in her white nightdress, and in her hands she

held a small sandalwood box. She laughed nervously.

"I thought you were sound asleep."

"I was up to a minute ago. I thought *you* were!"

"So I was. I didn't mean to lose myself either; but your incessant chatter acted as a soothing syrup, and I——" she hesitated.

"Then that snore was a blind?" said the maid of honor irrelevantly and in an injured tone.

Kathy laughed again.

"You'd better trot back to bed. It's dark, but it's almost morning. You'll get cold and——"

The maid of honor caught up a Roman shawl and flung it over her shoulders. Her black hair, which had become unfastened, spread over it like a veil and gave her a distinctly oriental look. She glanced witheringly at the bride's thin covering. Then she threw a white camel's hair over her friend's shoulders and sat down on the hearth rug by her. The reflection of a red flame crept up over the soft white covering like a caressing finger, wandering down again and touching the sandalwood before it died. The maid of honor broke the silence.

"What's in that box?" she demanded calmly.

The bride elect looked rebellious. Then she looked from the sandalwood back to her friend's face. Something unloosened her tongue.

"It's quite romantic, isn't it?" she began easily. "The conventional sandalwood box and all. You see," she went on, tapping the lid thoughtfully, "it's my treasure box, and I'm going over it tonight. I haven't opened it in years; not since——" she paused, catching sight of the maid of honor's face and remembering she was not alone—"not since I laid the last thing in it." She was speaking seriously now, and the maid of honor shivered a little in spite of the Roman shawl and the fire. "We all have our treasure boxes, I think—some of us not really and truly boxes, but in our hearts, perhaps—and we guard them jealously because some of them hold so much bitterness. I think sometimes"—she was gazing into the heart of the fire—"when we open them after many days, we find that they are not as valuable as we thought they were. Like a rose, you know, that

we had laid away fresh and sweet and thought of it always in that way, until we come to look at it and find its sweetness gone and it quite withered." Then, after a little: "Shall we open the box together, dear?"

The maid of honor drew closer. She had a queer feeling, as if she was about to look on a dead face in a casket.



SHE WAS CROUCHING BEFORE THE OPEN GRATE FIRE.

The bride elect lifted a small nosegay of faded flowers and held them in the hollow of her hand.

"Violets—the conventional flower, you see," she said lightly. "Jim Andrews gave them to me years ago, when we were scarcely more than children. I'd forgotten they were here. Jim was my first sweetheart. Jim's married now." She smiled. She laid them in the fire and turned to the box again. The photograph of an officer of the queen's service looked back at her. The maid of honor leaning over her shoulder exclaimed:

"What a splendid face! Who is he, Kathy?"

The bride elect did not answer immediately. She was fingering a bit of Scotch heather and bracken tied with the British colors.

"I met him the summer I was abroad. He was one of the truest, bravest men I ever knew," she said at length softly, in the tone in which we speak of our dead.

"There isn't much to tell. He loved me—he was one of the few men who never ceased to care. He asked me to send him this if I ever changed my mind. I never could. He fell nearly two years ago in the famous charge of the Highlanders. It was as he would have wished. I count it a privilege to have known him."

There was a silence in which the bit of heather and bracken followed the violets, but the gesture with which they were laid in the flames was tenderer. The bride elect paused with the picture in her hand. "A woman is a curious creature," she said reflectively, "with a heart like a wondrous keyboard. Sometimes a splendid man seeks it out, runs his fingers over the keys, and calls forth friendship, admiration, pity, but nothing more. Sometimes it is left to an unworthy one to strike the chord wherein lies a woman's soul. My Scotch laddie was among the first kind. Because I could not honestly give him all—my woman's best, and all a woman should give—I gave him nothing. I think I'll keep this," she added, still looking at the photograph. "Dick won't mind. Dick will understand. Will you please put it on the mantel?"

The maid of honor rose with the picture in her hand. She was looking down at the woman now, and could see into the shallow depths of the sandalwood box. A gauze fan—a dainty trifle as fragile and as exquisite as a woman's heart—lay therein with its ivory sticks snapped in two, and by it a pile of letters.

"Why, there's the fan I sent you from Paris, and——"

The top of the sandalwood box came down with a snap.

"That's all that would really interest you," said the bride elect quickly.

The maid of honor laid her hand on the lid.

"Kathy," she said, "that *isn't* all. I believe that the heart and the secret of it all lies here."

They were silent a moment.

"After all," said the bride elect, "you might as well know about it. I've told Dick. We think we ought not to begin the new life with any secrets. He guessed mine long ago anyhow, and it was he who

eased the pain and healed the wound by his tenderest love." She opened the box, but did not touch the contents. Then she went on: "Rather a curious mixture of heart trophies, isn't it? Remnants of Jim Andrews—our sweethearting days grown out of the fact of our mutual love for mud pies. Fragments of Mackenzie's life"—she glanced at where the withered heather and bracken had disappeared in the flames—"Mackenzie, the man who loved *me*, and for whom I could not teach myself to care." She paused and looked at the trifles that remained in the sandalwood box, and spoke low but without a trace of passion. "And—the faded, blighted memories of the man who first taught me the real meaning of the word." She was quiet for a moment before she spoke again. "After I told Dick the story, Dick told me of something in his own life—of a girl——" she broke off.



"SEE, THE DAY IS COMING."

The maid of honor suddenly turned her eyes away. A glow that might have come from the firelight spread across her face and reflected strange shadows in her eyes.

"Yes?"

"He told me that before he learned to care for me—the summer I was abroad—he met her at the mountains, and they saw a good deal of each other. You know how it is."

The maid of honor's lips moved slowly.

"Yes, I know."

"He said it was very pleasant, and that he said some of the foolish things that men are supposed to say; but that one day he imagined the girl really—cared. He says he can't be sure, but after that he left. He supposed she had understood the little game, and——"

"Did he tell you the girl's name?"

"I did not ask," said the older woman, lifting her head a little proudly. "I fancied myself that girl, and another girl trying to probe out her identity. Dick and I trust each other. Neither did I tell him the name of——" she broke off and lifted the package of yellow and worn letters. "The man who wrote me these, the man who first taught me how bitter love can be—lacked that highest sense of honor that sent Dick from the other girl when he had nothing to offer. The writer of these made me think it more than a little summer game. That's all."

The maid of honor drew in her breath quickly. A peace for which she had hunted vainly lay in the other woman's face and awed her.

"These are his letters—in order—the first he ever wrote to me and—the last. See, they are not even tied with the blue ribbon as they should be—only held by an elastic band. Something of my girlhood and of my life lies in them." She laid them in the flames. The maid of honor watched them burn with wide, frightened eyes, but the older woman sat quite silent and quite still. "The fan—I dropped it the night I found him—with another woman." She crept nearer to the fire and laid it against the blackened mass of letters. The flames crept around the gauzy stuff and played fitfully on the snapped carved sticks. She put the empty box on a table near and clasped her hands around her knees. The maid of honor was the first to speak.

"And—you—never—told—me!"

"You were away, and even if you had been here, it would have made no difference. There are some things in a girl's life she can't talk about. I wouldn't have let any one know—then. Only you and Dick know now."

"But how could you burn those letters?"

The older woman smiled.

"The treasure box has been opened—the rose is withered," she said simply.

And it was then for the first time that the maid of honor noticed something in her friend's eyes she had never seen before. And she—she had thought her own burden, her hidden love for Dick, greater than she could bear—the greatest in the world. This other woman had descended into the deeps of life and had brought forth the pearl of peace. Perhaps somewhere the consolation of that "tenderest love" waited for her, too.

The fire burned low, and the maid of honor rose and went over to the east window and drew aside the curtain. Faint streaks of red foretold the dawn.

"See, the day is coming."

The woman in white, crouching by the embers, rose and came and stood behind her. Involuntarily her hands stretched themselves forth toward the rising sun. She raised her head as a young queen might upon her coronation morn.

"My wedding day!" she said.

Maud Howard Peterson.

A WOMAN'S WAY.



HE was a very handsome woman; but she had known that fact so long—its values, what it gave her and what it had failed to give her—that the knowledge no longer afforded her any pleasure. It was relegated, in her outlook upon life, to merely one of the facts of her existence; a pleasant one, to be sure, but of comparatively small importance. Mrs. Reginald Bassett believed that she had outgrown all her emotions. As she stood in the long drawingroom,