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This issue:

**The Bride is Waiting**

by L. M. Montgomery



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# The Bride is Waiting

L. M. Montgomery

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Illustrations by *W. V. Chambers* have been omitted due to lack of death information.

*If he hadn't called that other woman "A Little Queen" it might never have happened—But everyone has a breaking point and that ancient bromide was Susan's*

Since it was Saturday Susan did not have to go to the college so there was little to divert her mind from the disturbing thought that it was her thirtieth birthday.

Aunt Ada had apparently forgotten it . . . although she had mentioned casually at the breakfast table that she noticed several gray hairs in Susan's sleek, dark head. Aunt Ada would mention things like that. Susan knew the gray hairs were there. It did not matter, she had told herself when she had first discovered them. Nothing like that had mattered since the telegram had come so many years ago bearing the brief, terrible tidings of Vernon Darby's death at Vimy Ridge. It did not matter if all her hair turned gray . . . like her life. Gray and lustreless. But was that any reason why everyone should forget her birthday?

Even Ellery had forgotten it. It was the first birthday for ten years that he had not sent her roses. But more likely he had not forgotten . . . probably he was just being odiously tactful. He might have thought that a girl would not care to have it said, even with roses, that she was thirty. She wasn't going to think about such things at all. Nobody cared whether the teacher of Modern Languages at Clement's were thirty or fifty so long as she was efficient.

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BUT even that reflection did not help her to forget that she was thirty. That fact kept bobbing up at every breathing spell. Thirty *did* sound so horribly much older than twenty-nine. And yet there was still so much of life ahead to be lived through somehow. Lived through as a drab teacher of Modern Languages to girls whose only use for any language, ancient or modern, seemed to be talking to and about boys. Susan was not often as unjust to the girls as that. But, she reflected darkly, the arrival of thirty did things to you.

She had been very conscious of its approach for some weeks. And she had been wondering if, after all, it would not be wiser to tell Ellery she would marry him when her birthday came and brought with it his annual proposal. Ellery had such a confirmed habit of asking her to marry him on her birthdays. She never seemed able to convince him that she meant to be forever faithful to the memory of Vernon Darby. And now . . . well, she would be faithful, in a way, as somebody had said. It couldn't really be considered unfaithful to make the best of what remained for herself and Ellery. They had always been good pals ever since their High School days. She could never, she believed, give him the love that was buried somewhere in France

but real companionship meant much. She had decided that she would tell him graciously that if he were satisfied with what she could give him she would marry him. She felt that she was being very kind to Ellery in this decision and that he ought to be very appreciative and grateful. Susan found herself looking forward to his happiness. It would be wonderful to make him happy, even if she could be nothing more than merely contented herself. It was, of course, impossible for her ever to love anybody again. But there were substitutes.

When Ellery Boyden dropped in rather late that evening he did not bring any roses. Susan had seen him coming up the street, with Banjo loping at his heels. Evidently she was to be the fag-end of his evening's hike. She sighed a little . . . she breathed a prayer to Vernon for pardon . . . she went forward to accept her destiny and Ellery.

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AN hour later Susan was feeling decidedly let down. Ellery did not seem to have the slightest intention of proposing. He lounged deliberately in the chair he affected and talked of a score of things that ought to have been interesting. Banjo, a gay little dog with a hint of wistfulness behind his gayety, lay on the floor at Susan's feet with his head on her shoe. Susan loved Banjo but as the time wore on she had a perverse inclination to pull her foot away and let Banjo look elsewhere for a pillow.

Ellery had suddenly fallen silent. Susan perked up a bit. Perhaps it was coming after all.

The first signs were about as usual. Ellery cleared his throat, uncrossed his legs and crossed them again. So far, normal. But Ellery was nervous. Susan had never before seen Ellery nervous on the occasion of his annual proposal. Did he, too, feel that things had drifted long enough and that it was time for a definite decision?

"I've really come to ask a favour of you, Susan," said Ellery jerkily. "A great . . . favour."

This was a new gambit. Susan pricked up her ears. But she did not pull away her foot from Banjo's head. He was such a darling dog.

"I'm sure there's nobody in the world for whom I'd sooner do a favour," she said graciously. "If it is in my power, that is."

"Oh, it's in your power all right," said Ellery. "In fact you are the very one. You have such perfect taste."

Was the man going to ask her to pick him out a neck-tie? He couldn't be proposing. Susan did not wholly pull her foot away but she jerked it and Banjo moaned a protest in his sleep.

"I . . . I've bought a house," said Ellery. He seemed to have difficulty in

speaking. Something was embarrassing him horribly. "And I want . . . that is . . . I'd like . . . would you mind very much . . . helping me to furnish it?"

So it *was* a proposal after all. Susan smiled to herself in the twilight. It was to be baited with a house this time. Fancy Ellery buying a house, the poor darling! As if she would marry him for a house! How clever he thought himself! And how unnecessary it all was when she had already made up her mind to marry him for other and better reasons.

"Why," she said slowly, "I'm afraid I don't know very much about furnishing a house, Ellery."

"Oh, you know all about such things," said Ellery positively. "I'd make a frightful botch of it, I knew. I'd mix Victorian and Georgian and Modernistic all up together and the result would be a nightmare. You can picture it for yourself."

Susan could. But she was not going to surrender too easily . . . and certainly not to a house. Ellery must be shown that his new dodge was unfortunate.

"But you see, Ellery, my taste mightn't suit the . . . the mistress of the house."

"Oh, it would . . . I'm sure it would." Ellery was more eager than ever. "I know Juanita will love anything you select."

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JUANITA! Susan pulled away her foot and Banjo woke up. He looked at her reproachfully and then went over and sat down beside Ellery. His expression said plainly.

"I am fond of you, Susan . . . but if there's to be a difference of opinion between you and Ellery you might as well know at once where I stand."

"Who is Juanita?" Susan heard herself asking.

"The girl I'm going to marry," said Ellery explosively. "Juanita Vaughan. I met her last Christmas when I was down home. She's . . . she's an angel, Susan."

"I suppose so." Susan had had enough time to recover from . . . well, from her surprise. What else? Anybody would be surprised by such an unexpected piece of news. Susan laughed a little. She did not laugh often but when she did her laughter was generally beautiful. It did not sound exactly beautiful just now but Ellery was in no condition of mind to notice that. "This *is* a real birthday surprise, Ellery."

"Oh, . . . to be sure . . . this *is* your birthday," said Ellery confusedly. "I'd forgotten . . . I was buying the house . . . I'm sorry."

"Don't be," said Susan graciously. "You couldn't be expected to remember birthdays under the circumstances. Besides . . . when one is thirty one prefers such forgetfulness. As for this news of yours, Ellery . . . now that I've got my breath . . . I'm so very glad to hear it. As an old friend there's no happiness I don't wish you.

But you might have told me before, I think . . . I really do.”

“There wasn’t anything to tell . . . till just a few days ago. I mean . . . it wasn’t settled. You are the first one I’ve told. I . . . I knew you’d be glad I wasn’t going to keep on being foolish forever. We’ll always be good pals, Susan, won’t we?”

“Naturally. I couldn’t see us being anything else,” said Susan more graciously still.

“And Juanita . . . you’ll be her friend too, won’t you? She’ll need a good friend . . . she’s so young . . . a mere baby . . .”

“I can’t imagine your wife and I *not* being friends, Ellery.”

“I knew you’d see it like that,” said Ellery triumphantly. “You’re such a darling, dependable old sport, Susan. And about the house . . . you’ll help me, won’t you?”

“I’ll see what I can do, if you think my point of view will suit . . . Juanita. What house have you bought?”

“Dan Weaver’s house up on the hill . . . Cat’s Ladder . . . you know it.”

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YES, Susan knew it. She and Ellery had passed it on one of their hikes and she had exclaimed enthusiastically over it. Susan loved nice houses. All her life she had lived in Aunt Ada’s big, handsome, hideous one, in its bare treeless lot, and hated it. But the Weaver place . . . Cat’s Ladder, Dan had named it because of the steep ravine behind it . . . had beckoned to her as an unquestioned member of its tribe. And now she was to furnish it for Juanita.

“I rushed off to buy it as soon as Juanita wrote me that she would marry me,” said Ellery. “I . . . it *belonged* to her . . . I could see her in it. She’s . . . she’s beautiful, Susan.”

“I’m sure you wouldn’t choose anyone who wasn’t,” said Susan, more gracious every time she spoke. It did not occur to either her or Ellery that she was really paying herself quite a handsome compliment. “What is she like . . . I mean what is her type? I’ll have to know something about that if I’m to furnish her house for her. But really, Ellery, wouldn’t it be better to wait till you’re married and let her do her own furnishing? I’m sure *I* wouldn’t like another woman to furnish my house for me.”

“No . . . but Juanita’s different,” said Ellery out of a dreamy rapture. “She’s only a child . . . and she’s always had everything done for her . . . one of the Edgetown Vaughans, you know. She isn’t a bit efficient, Susan . . .” Susan flinched . . . “And I don’t want her bothered about practical things. I’ve set my heart on getting my home all ready for her . . . and bringing her there.”

“Carrying her in over the threshold, I suppose,” said Susan a trifle sarcastically.

“Yes, just that,” said Ellery simply. “It will be easy . . . she’s so . . . so girlish. As

for her type Juanita should be dark of course, with a name like that . . . but she is as fair as the moon. With sparkling hair and soft, radiant, dark-green eyes . . . I never knew how beautiful green eyes could be until I saw Juanita . . . a shy, ethereal creature with a Madonna face.”

“And I’m to furnish Cat’s Ladder to suit *that*,” said Susan in a tone of mock dismay. “When . . . when is the wedding to be?”

“In late August, I hope. That will give us time for a month in Muskoka.”

“And this is mid-May. Three months. Well, I’ll do my best, Ellery.”

“Thank you.” Ellery got up with an air of relief. “You’ve taken a weight off what’s left of my mind, Susan. Come, Banjo.”

Banjo went. But at the door he turned and looked back at Susan. “I have to stand by *him* you understand . . . but not by *her*,” he said plainly.

Susan after a few minutes alone in the spring night, ran singing upstairs. Aunt Ada looked out from her room.

“What is the matter, child?”

“Matter? Why, nothing is the matter,” said Susan. “I’m singing.”

“You never sing except when something is bothering you.”

“Nothing is bothering me,” said Susan decidedly. “Nothing at all. I’m delighted and excited. I’ve a summer of pure delight ahead of me . . . I’ve promised to furnish a home for Ellery Boyden and his bride . . . one of the Edgetown Vaughans, you know. Who wouldn’t sing over such a prospect?”

“Well,” said Aunt Ada consolingly, “there are as good fish in the sea as ever come out of it.”

Susan shut her door with a bang. No use arguing with Aunt Ada. Aunt Ada would never believe that her heart was buried in France. Susan had suddenly gone back to this belief herself. She went and looked at herself in the mirror. Well, she was not in the least like Juanita Vaughan. She, Susan, was tall and black-haired . . . black *yet* . . . with brook-brown eyes. She certainly couldn’t be conveniently carried over anybody’s threshold. But wasn’t her air of distinction getting a little shop worn?

“Ellery is thirty-five and he is marrying a baby,” she said contemptuously. “Evidently being Professor of Economics and Sociology in Clement college doesn’t make a man sensible when it comes to choosing a wife. Well, laugh at yourself, Susan, dear. This is the very time for your noted sense of humour to function. Sitting, all dressed up on your thirtieth birthday, confidently expecting to be proposed to. And the man in the case comes and asks you to . . . furnish a house for his fair, ethereal bride. Why, it’s a picture for the comic strip, Susan.”

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"I've seen a good many houses I liked," said Ellery. "They would *do*. But when I saw this house I knew I had to have it. You remember that evening a year ago, when we were out for mayflowers, Susan, and took this short cut home? We both looked up and saw it at the same time."

"*Recognized* it although we'd never seen it before," said Susan dreamily. "I've always want . . . loved a white and green house."

Cat's Ladder was even more charming than she remembered it. Houses with charm always thrilled Susan . . . they were so rare. What a view! The city spread far below them . . . the college campus to the left . . . the beautiful tower of the memorial library framed between two slender lombardies against a soft, flushed evening sky . . . dreamy hills to the right, with an exquisite valley between.

"Some valleys are so lovable," Ellery was saying. "Just to look at them gives you pleasure. That valley is one of them. But that tree must come down, mustn't it?"

"That lovely maple . . . oh, you'd never cut *that* down," cried Susan, who loved trees with passion.

"It spoils the view," defended Ellery.

"It doesn't . . . it simply guards it as a treasure. And can't you see what dignity and beauty and romance it lends to that corner. I am sure Juanita will love that tree."

Susan wasn't any too sure of it really. She felt that green-eyed creatures never could love trees. But Ellery had no misgivings.

"Yes, she will. So we'll leave it. When I come to think of it, it will be just the place to have breakfast under on summer mornings. We'll have breakfast out-of-doors whenever possible. Look at that far hill over there, Susan. It is a friend of mine. Doesn't it seem like a remote, austere old man in this light? But in other lights it grows mellow and lovable. We'll have a garden in that sunny corner. I must have larkspur and columbine . . . foxgloves and white iris . . . and canterbury bells, white, pink, delicious mauve flecked with purple. The gardens in Edgetown are full of them."

"Will your lady of the sparkling hair like such old-fashioned flowers?" asked Susan spitefully.

"She loves everything beautiful," said Ellery fatuously.

Susan couldn't endure fatuousness so she went inside to have a look over the interior. She hoped to be able to find lots of faults . . . things that would make it easy to let Mrs. Ellery Boyden have the house. But she couldn't find one. The sunny dining-room with its recessed window, shaded with wistaria, was Susan's idea of a dining-room. There was lovely shadow tapestry on the walls when the sunlight fell through the leaves. The living-room, with the two pointed firs before its east window,

really lived. The quaint window on the stair landing with the broad, deep seat where one could sit and look down into the ravine was not a window . . . it was a personality.

“Don’t you think she’ll love the view from this window?” asked Ellery. “I’m glad all my windows have a beautiful view. There is some special loveliness to be seen from each one of them. I want her dear eyes to see nothing but beauty whenever she looks out of my house.”

Susan reflected that falling in love did have a tendency to make people sentimental. But she was very tolerant. And Cat’s Ladder had such possibilities. She found herself taking a keen interest in them. To her surprise the following weeks were full of interest. Susan put out of her mind all thought of Juanita and decided she would furnish Cat’s Ladder to suit her own taste.

“There’s no use trying to do anything else. I don’t know Juanita in spite of Ellery’s raptures and it is of no use doing up the house according to my hazy conception of her. Ellery must trust me all in all or not at all when it comes to a question of tastes.”

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ELLERY was very trusting. Beyond telling Susan she need not worry over prices he interfered very little. She dragged him about a good bit hunting for things that belonged to Cat’s Ladder and they had some arguments but Ellery always gave in. Susan had a nose for quaint findings and the delightful old brass knocker she found in a dilapidated Jew’s shop on the east side made her weep with joy. Ellery’s old Persian rug, with the tree of life woven in it, went on the living room floor, although Ellery wanted to buy something new and bright. There was a beautiful old grandfather clock and an oak settee for the hall. Susan picked up lovely old pictures with printed legends on them and charming old blue platters and hand-wrought iron candlesticks. There was a Stuart table with twist-turned legs that Ellery’s grandmother had had and Susan insisted on putting his sea-captain uncle’s mahogany chest of drawers in the living-room, although Ellery thought it should be smuggled out of sight in some back bedroom.

“It’s the loveliest thing you have,” said Susan severely.

They spent a wholly delightful afternoon looking over everything in it. Ellery had never troubled to go through it before. He was amazed. Corals . . . pink and white and spotted shells . . . feathers of strange tropical birds . . . seeds and nuts from mid-sea islands . . . ivory idols . . . wonderful embroideries.

“Isn’t it delightful unpacking these old drawers? You don’t know what we may come across,” said Susan happily. “Oh!” She pounced on something in a tiny box

with a squeal of delight. "What is it? Oh, Ellery, it's a little real pearl . . . an unpolished pearl! Isn't it a darling thing?"

"I must have that set in a ring for Juanita," said Ellery.

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SUSAN had forgotten Juanita in the wonders of that chest. She got up, a little pale and cross. She was tired. She had spent all the forenoon in a department store, since an Edgetown Vaughan's home could not be wholly furnished with antiques. At that, it was fascinating to go into a big store and pick things to buy . . . pretty things that just *wanted* to be taken away from all the glitter and too-muchness to be made part of a real home. She had spent several sleepless nights over Ellery's window draperies but the result justified her loss of slumber. Though Susan found she was having too many sleepless nights, even when there was no question of window draperies. It was a hot summer and furniture hunting was strenuous work. Her nerves were going. Things were beginning to annoy her. That light in Ellery's eyes whenever he talked of Juanita, for example. And that little gold cushion on the window seat. Ellery had bought that off his own bat. He told her that he wanted it because he could picture Juanita's paler gold of hair against its warm background. Susan hated it. And she thought it very silly. It would make golden hair look pale and faded.

"Juanita should have a lovely dull green. That cushion belongs to dark ladies."

"I'm sure it will suit her," said Ellery stubbornly. "I love to picture that thistledown charm of hers in this dim corner against this gold cushion. She'll look like a Madonna with an aureole."

So the cushion continued to glow like a small sun on the dark window-seat and Susan's fingers tingled to hurl it down the ravine every time she saw it. Thistledown charm, forsooth!

Everything else she loved. And there was so much to love now. It was late July and Cat's Ladder was complete in every detail. Susan went over it and its perfection tore anew at her heart. That it should be wasted on a child whose only conception of a house was a place to eat and sleep in, during the intervals of making whoopee. She had gathered from Ellery that Juanita was fond of a good time. Ellery really talked too much about Juanita. Under the circumstances a little reserve would be in better taste. But Susan listened patiently and pretended to be sympathetic and understanding. And under everything was a sense of deep satisfaction in something well done. So well done that it would be hard for even Juanita to spoil it or undo it. Susan thought of a house she had been in that day . . . the chair coverings too vivid . . . the pictures arranged horribly . . . the lampshades unforgivable . . . the lighting all wrong . . . the rugs all wrong . . . the angles of the furniture all wrong. Susan

shuddered and thanked Heaven for the contrast of Cat's Ladder.

"Cat's Ladder is ready for your bride," she told Ellery one hot July evening. She was lying listlessly on her chair; she had been too tired to do up her shabby face and she looked pale and . . . *old*, she told herself fiercely.

"How can I ever thank you?" said Ellery humbly.

"Don't bother," said Susan listlessly. "Why should you? I've had my fun out of it. I've really enjoyed doing up that place. When is the wedding to be, Ellery?"

"It's not quite settled yet. I'm expecting to know the final date any day now. I . . . I hope it will be soon. Susan, you look tired."

"Dragged to death, as Aunt Ada informed me at supper time. Aunt Ada is so comforting. You must remember I'm over thirty, Ellery. People begin to get tired when youth is past. Banjo, why are you sitting there on your tail, grinning at me? Ellery, will Juanita like Banjo? Will she let him bring his bones into the house?"

"I'm afraid Juanita doesn't care much for dogs. She seems a little afraid of them. I must get her a cat. She is fond of cats."

"How will Banjo get on with a cat?"

"He'll have to get used to it."

"They say one can get used to everything even to being hanged," sighed Susan. "I've never believed it. Poor little dorglums! Even a dog ought to have some rights, oughtn't he, Ellery? Do you think you are going to be quite fair to Banjo?"

"There she is singing again," thought Aunt Ada, as Susan went to her room. "Susan has never sung so much as she has this summer. I do hope she will soon be in better spirits."

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ELLERY telephoned up at five o'clock one fine blue evening and asked Susan if she would meet him at Cat's Ladder around eight. He had something to tell her. She knew what it was . . . the date of his wedding day. Well, she wasn't interested. When you are horribly tired you can't care about anything. You cannot love or hate or weep or jest. But she made up her mind she would go up to Cat's Ladder at seven and have one last hour of it before Ellery came. And say good-bye to it.

Cat's Ladder had never looked so beautiful . . . so *happy*. Susan had never felt so close to it . . . so *one* with it. She loved it as much as she hated Juanita. For she did hate Juanita . . . she admitted that to herself at last. It was torture to think of Juanita being mistress of Cat's Ladder . . . moving the furniture about . . . sitting by the fireplace . . . laughing at Banjo when everyone knew he couldn't bear to be laughed at . . . handling the dishes . . . Susan clenched her hands. She couldn't bear the thought of Juanita handling the dishes. Suppose she, Susan, simply smashed them

all now. Especially that darling robin's-egg pitcher with the little golden roses on it. Juanita shouldn't have that . . . Susan couldn't bear it . . . she would smash *it* anyhow. She ran to the mantel-piece and seized it. Then she saw herself in the mirror . . . and set the pitcher back. Heavens, what a thin, withered, efficient old woman she was going to make! All alone . . . with no interest in life! She hated Juanita . . . beautiful Juanita who had never made her green eyes dim poring over exam papers. Just at that moment Susan could cheerfully have handed her a poisoned philtre of Borgia brewing.

"Come out and see the sunset," said Ellery by the door.

"I've seen hundreds of sunsets. Is there anything special about this one?" asked Susan grumpily. She had no intention of going out. Here in the twilight she need not smile bravely. Susan felt that her face would simply crack in two if she smiled just once again when Ellery mentioned Juanita.

"There is always something special about any sunset," said Ellery. But he came in and sat down beside her on the divan. He did not say anything at first. And Susan wouldn't speak . . . *couldn't* speak. She was horrified to find herself trembling . . . to find herself a boiling, seething volcano of hate and rage and fury and despair . . . she who had been so certain that she could never feel deeply about anything again. She hated Juanita more savagely than ever . . . Juanita who was to have *her* house and her man . . . yes, her man! Vernon Darby had suddenly become nothing save a pale phantom of Vimy Ridge.

"Just think, Susan," Ellery said at last, "in two more months my lady will be here . . . my little queen. It seems . . ." his voice dropped reverently . . . "too wonderful to be true. Susan, do you think that by any chance I'm only dreaming?"

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PERHAPS if Ellery had never given tongue to that terrible bromide, "little queen", Susan might not have quite lost her self-control. But it was the last straw. She stood up.

"Yes, I think you are, you abysmal idiot," she said furiously. "You *are* an idiot to think of marrying a young girl . . . a brainless, empty, beautiful little fool without two ideas in her skull, as pretty and insipid as a movie star. Dreaming . . . yes. And you'll waken up with a vengeance when it's too late . . . and nobody will pity you . . . everybody will laugh at you . . ."

Susan choked on a hysterical peal of laughter. Ellery stood up.

"Ah, now, that's something like," he said in a tone of satisfaction. "I think if you had kept up your smiling, indifferent pose of sympathetic pal and comrade one minute longer I would have brained you with that brass andiron. You don't know

what narrow risks of assassination you've run this summer. As for Juanita, I agree with you that she is too young for me . . . much. I've felt that all along. But don't call her brainless and empty. She is amazingly intelligent . . . for a child who was five her last birthday. She's really a darling, Susan . . . I'm sure you'll love her when we go to Edgetown for Christmas."

Susan stopped laughing and looked at Ellery. Ellery looked back with a sheepish grin.

"Gad, how I hate to explain! Still, it's bliss to have the luxury of telling the truth again after my orgy of lies. But I *did* tell you that Juanita was a mere baby, didn't I? So much was profoundly true. And I had to do something, Susan, to show you that . . . that . . ."

"That what I thought was devotion was only a sentimental thrall of yesterday," said Susan slowly. She felt that she ought to be angry . . . but she could only feel shamelessly glad.

"No, but that you really did care for me if you would only let yourself see it. Remember, I had to fight a ghost. I was desperate . . . I realized that it was my last chance. What say, Susan? Cat's Ladder is ready for its mistress and only you can be that?"

"I ought to hate you . . . and throw Cat's Ladder in your face . . . and leave you," said Susan. "But I can't . . . I just can't. Instead, I . . . I . . . think I'm going to cry on your shoulder."

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Because of copyright considerations, the illustrations by W. V. Chambers (?-?) have been omitted from this etext.

[The end of *The Bride is Waiting* by L. M. (Lucy Maud) Montgomery]