

KEEP A THING FOR SEVEN YEARS

E LLEN COULTER was not called a maiden lady, business woman, modiste or costumier, or any such felicitous name, though she was all of these. She was said to be an old maid who sewed by the day, for her lot was cast among plain, blunt folk of lowland Scotch ancestry who despised high-sounding words. But Ellen Coulter did not mind; she was a contented woman, who lived quite happily in her own world, and kept a diary, carrying it about with her in a black bag, the key of which hung around her neck. She knew she could make dresses, and she also knew she could have been married if she had been as easily pleased as some; and in both these assurances her soul was sustained and comforted. She was a sentimental little thing, too, and loved to make wedding dresses. Her pincushion, heart-shaped, of red felt, was suspended from her waist, but the pins for immediate use she kept in her mouth.

The women of the neighborhood all liked Ellen, she was so safe and silent. They could tell her anything and know that it would go "no further." And besides, she kept them up with the fashions, for Miss Coulter made two trips a year to the City to see what was being worn, and, when she returned, introduced circular skirts, sheathe dresses, boleros, or irregular hem lines, with an unerring hand. But she tempered fashion with mercy, and had due regard for the general contour of her clients. Her gift for silence won her many admirers, even among the men, who had not thought any woman capable of such reticence.