

"That I will, if she will have it," was Peter's reply, and he and the teacher parted.

Peter entered the little farm-house by the well much more thoughtful than he had left it. While he looked upon his contemplated course at college as merely an addition to his life, it worried him to find his old and experienced friends considering it a change of life. Why all this seriousness? Did anyone doubt his love for Lizzie, or fear it was not lasting? He knew better, and to convince them of their error he resolved to seal his betrothal that night, if Lizzie would have him, which he had no reason to doubt. Lizzie looked up at him with a smile as he entered, and, walking towards her, he seated himself on a low stool at her side. Her parents were busy reading the weekly papers, and apparently paid no attention to them, though a close observer might have seen a twinkle in Mr. Tilton's eyes, due perhaps to the lamp light.

"You will write to me, Lizzie, will you not?" asked Peter in a low tone.

"If you wish it, Peter," was the reply. "I will answer your letters, but there will not be much news in mine for you."

"You can at least tell me that I am not forgotten. That alone will be welcome to me in my bachelor quarters."

"The hearts that stay at home never forget, Peter; it is those who go away that forget."

Lizzie bent her head over her work. She could not see to sew, for tears were filling her eyes. She struggled manfully with them, and they got no further than the lashes.

Meanwhile old Mr. Tilton had laid down his paper, and taken off his spectacles to wipe them. As he did so, he cast a glance at the young couple, and the twinkle left his eyes. Then in a moment the cloud cleared, and he began making eccentric gestures to his wife, who was busy rocking and reading.

He winked inordinately, he screwed his mouth round, he waved his hands surreptitiously, and finally succeeded in attracting her attention.

She said:

"Well, of all the fools I ever saw, you are the biggest. What do you want now? Can't you speak out, instead of making such outlandish grimaces?"

"Sh!" said Mr. Tilton, pointing over his shoulder with his thumb at the young people. And then he began his grimaces and winking again. Mrs. Tilton looked at him, first with annoyance, then amusement, then indecision, and finally with a smiling assent to whatever he had been telling her.

She got up and slipped out of the room. A moment later she called Lizzie, who rose and obeyed her.

Mrs. Tilton soon returned and, speaking to Peter, said:—

"I'm sending Liz to sister Sarah's on an errand, Peter. She won't be long gone."

"Mayn't I go with her?" asked Peter. "The road is lonely and she may be timid."

"That's for her to say," replied her mother.

At this instant Lizzie entered, dressed ready for the journey. She stopped in the doorway to tie the knot of her bonnet, throwing back her hair as she did so.

"May I go with you, Lizzie?" said Peter.

"If you like."

After the door was closed on them, Mr. Tilton turned to his wife with the remark:

"There, let them get the parting over under the moon. What right have we to be poking our noses in our young people's love affairs, beyond seeing that their choice is wise?"

"Is it wise, father?" asked the old lady. "He is so ambitious, you know. Well, well, every one must risk something, and I think he will be true to her."

Silently the two lovers strolled along the country road. It was not necessary to speak. Each other's presence was enough, and the scene so charming that the eye could feed on it and save the brain from thought. It was autumn, as we have said, and the stubble stood in the fields. Along one portion of their path they skirted the river. Aspens whispered and quivered in the night air, and under the faint moonlight the ruins of an old stone house stood ghastly pale amid tall weeds and golden rods now turning brown.

It was not until the return journey that Peter spoke. With a lover's keen perception, he knew that an interrupted conversation, or one taking place when there was some other duty to do, was not suited for making a declaration in. He knew that the walk home might be as slow as they liked, but to catch Lizzie's aunt still up needed haste.

As they drew near the turn of the road by the river bank, he stooped to Lizzie and said:

"Let us rest here a moment, Liz, you are tired."

She obeyed him unquestioningly.

"Lizzie," he continued, "are you really afraid I shall forget you?"

"I—I don't know, Peter."

Peter seated himself beside his sweetheart and took her hand in his.

"Now Lizzie, do you think it is quite fair to treat me in this way? Have I, even for a moment, been untrue during the past year? Have I not worked to get this chance to go to college in order to lift you out of your place as a farmer's daughter? You are fit for any position, my dear girl. There need be no fear of my deserting you, for high as I may lift myself in the world, you will always be ready to step up beside me. Come, get that idea out of your pretty head. Does my love need proof? I don't think so, Liz, but yours does. Let me put this on your finger, that when I am far away among my books, you can see it and think of me."

And he drew his ring off and slipped it on her finger. "There, darling, keep it; and may the thought of it give you happiness, as it will me when we are apart."

An instant Lizzie sat twisting the ring round on her finger, and then she slowly drew it off and held it out towards him.

"No, Peter, I will not take it. Let us think as well as we can of one another in the future. No ring can strengthen our love, and I will not bind you to me, when, perhaps, your heart will turn false. Was it for this Mr. Forbes called you away with him? No, no, Peter, be warned in time. Give up these ambitions of yours, and stay here where you were born and bred, and I will be your wife, gladly. But go away and