

it was the moral obligation that held her as with cords of steel.

Yet she felt dimly that this obligation would not seem so binding to others as to herself; that they might even laugh at her conscientiousness. Nevertheless, she could not rid herself of the feeling, nor decide to make any move which did not seem to her exaggerated sense of right, the correct one.

All these thoughts floated hurriedly through her brain as she sat there listening to Peter's pleadings. She felt that she could not decide at once; there was so much to be said on both sides.

"Give me a little time, Peter," she said at last, when she could get control of her voice. "I do—care—for you, and, oh, I want so much to go home, but—"

"Well, what's to hinder, Martha?" said Peter wonderingly. "You've nobody, and neither have I—that is, whose—consent we have to ask; and we're not so young that they'd refuse us a license at the clerk's office," he chuckled.

Then Martha tried to explain to him her scruples. To his everlasting credit be it said that Peter Eliot did not laugh, at least not just then. He coughed very hard once or twice, however, and his voice sounded a trifle husky when he said at last, "Why, Martha, dear, anybody'd think you'd been sent to the penitentiary for life, to hear you talk. Think it over, though. I won't urge you, and maybe by and by you'll see it different."

So they parted, Peter to return to the farm, which needed his attention for a few weeks, he thought.

Probably he could not have done a wiser thing, as he may have felt vaguely himself, than to leave Martha for a time to her own devices and thoughts.

For she missed him; oh, how she missed him, in spite of the cheery letters which came two or three times

a week, telling all the neighborhood news, of what he was doing about the old homestead, and now and then a hint of his own needs and loneliness. This last was almost more than she could bear.

Yet she did not feel equal to the ordeal which her exaggerated sensitiveness pictured as lying before her should she decide to make this break in her present life. Aside from the scruples which still held her fast, she thought of the surprise of the matron and board of managers, when she should tell them that she was going away so soon to be married. She imagined the good-natured banterings of her newly-found friends; the task of preparing for the wedding, the congratulations; the jests. Perhaps they might even throw rice after her. When she mentioned all this to Peter, it was perhaps the greatest test of his loyalty that could have been made, that he respected her feelings, although they must have seemed almost childish to him.

"Martha, dear," he wrote back, "if this is all that separates us—the thoughts of telling your friends about it, of what they will say, and of having a wedding—why, then, for heaven's sake, don't have one, of the ordinary kind, I mean. Let's run away; elope. I hadn't thought of it before, but now it strikes me as just the thing to do. You know I ran away once before, and I guess it kind of runs in my blood to do things of that kind.

"You told me once that there was a good fire escape opening off your room. (I asked about it because I always was afraid of fires in those institutions). Now, what is easier, Martha, dear, than for you to step quietly out of the window some evening after supper, with your little grip in your hand, and I'll meet you at the bottom of the steps. I'll have it all fixed up with the preacher, and we'll be married without any fuss or feathers or congratulations or breaking of con-