

They went over and over the memories of the past. They talked of the strange lands that Peter had visited, of the wonderful experiences he had gone through, of some narrow escapes he had had, "through his own foolhardiness," he explained. He told her of his boyish longings to travel; for adventure, which had led him to cast aside all the ties of home; of how he had thrown himself with all the ardor of an intense nature, into the life which he had chosen. Of how at last, however, the old ties had asserted themselves. As the years went by he began to long for the associations of his childhood. He had saved enough, he said, to keep him the rest of his days, and now he had come back.

Martha's pulses fluttered strangely as he told her these things, and at the strange, tender way in which his blue eyes rested on her. In fact, in these days, Martha hardly knew herself. For the first time in her life the deeper emotions of her nature were aroused, with all their sweetness, all their tenderness, all their contradictions. For in all the wide world, there is nothing so deep, so inexplicable, to herself as well as to others, as a woman's heart. No wonder they sometimes fail to be understood by others, when they hardly understand themselves!

They were sitting in the park one day, half hidden from passers-by by a clump of shrubbery, when Peter moved a little closer to her and laid one of his great hands on hers. They had been sitting silent for some time, as had grown to be their custom now and then after one of their talks.

"I went to see the old place again yesterday, Martha," he said in a tone rather softer than usual, "and—I—bought it."

Martha looked up, too startled to say anything in reply. Peter was looking off dreamily at the great white clouds above the trees.

"Yes," he went on, as though she had spoken, "I bought it, for the sake of old memories, and because I want a home of my own, Martha. I want to settle down for the rest of my days. Great Caesar! What a wanderer I've been! But it won't be a home, Martha, without you. Will you come and make one for me, dear?"

But Martha was trembling so that she could not speak.

"I know it's asking a good deal," he went on, perceiving her agitation, "to ask you to leave this pleasant place, where you have everything so fine and citified and go back to the farm to live with an old fellow like me. But,—I love you, Martha; and, lately,—I've thought maybe—you could learn to care for me a little—and that—perhaps—you'd rather have your own home than even such a fine one as you have here."

Her own home! Oh, what would it not mean to her! But any place would be home now, with Peter, she thought to herself. Yet, strangely, she could not put her feelings in words; perhaps their very intensity choked her.

Then, besides, another thought had been running through Martha Grayson's mind of late; one that would seem almost inexplicable to one who did not understand the strange workings of the Puritan conscience.

When she came to Springfield, she felt that it was to spend the rest of her days; that she had burned her bridges and there was no going back; that in some way she had bound herself to remain until she went out of this world. It was a sort of legal transaction, she said to herself, to which she was a party, and she felt bound to carry out her part of the contract.

And now, if she should leave, after having been there only a few months, what would they think of her? She would forfeit her entrance money, she knew, but she did not care for that;