## RACHEL.

A TRUE STORY OF WESTERN FARM LIFE.

*Continued.*

"Clear out to bed this minute, Rachel," said her father, "I want no sniveling here."

Upstairs in the cold, dark room, what bitter thoughts surged through the childish brain.

Mr. Stillman loved his wife and children, although you may not think so. He wanted them to be happy, but in his way. He must choose their pleasures. If they could not find pleasure in the things that pleased him it was not his fault. It was their perverseness. And as no two souls are alike, the attempt to fit a number of them by the same pattern necessarily caused a good deal of pain to the souls undergoing the trying operation. Mrs. Stillman's sensative organization was completely crushed; her eldest daughter's nearly so. Martha, the second daughter, refusing to be shaped, had escaped by marrying a clever young hired man who pitied and then loved the pretty daughter of his employer, and persuaded her that by eloping with him she would be more happily situated at all events than she was at home. The mesalliance angered Mr. Stillman greatly, and since the marriage, which had taken place a year ago, all intercourse with the disobedient daughter had been forbidden.

Margaret, the third daughter, as we have seen, also rebelled at the fitting, and having a goodly portion of her father's determination it was evident he would have some trouble in completing it. So far Rachel had given him no trouble. She and Susan were only babies in his opinion, and as he ordered them about he no more thought of their feelings than he did of those of the horses he worked.

With the boys it was different. They would be men some day. They must be treated with more consideration. At an early age John, two years older than Elizabeth, was given a share in the stock and land to cultivate for himself, so that when at the age of 24 he married the daughter of a neighboring farmer he had a "right good start" in life.

But his sister toiled early and late, washing, ironing, milking, churning, baking, nursing the younger children, in short, sharing as far as she could her mother's labors for her board and a scanty, grudgingly given wardrobe. She was 24 now and had never in her life known what it was to possess a five dollar bill. There are many Mr. Stillmans. Are they honest men? If the son had a right to wages had not the daughter? I leave the question with you.

Poor Rachel carried a heavy heart to school next morning. The Tinker's wonderful allegory to her vivid imagination was very real. And now to leave her here in that awful dungeon, never to know how he escaped, was almost more than she could bear.

"Here, Rachel," said the teacher when the time for recess came, "here is your book." He held it toward her but she did not take it. "Father," she said, then sobs choked her utterance. The young man looked at her silently a moment, then he said, "I am so interested in Christian, Rachel, that I will read aloud if you will listen."

In all her life Rachel never forgot their readings at recesses and noons, which lasted not only until Christian reached the Celestial city, but until Christiana and her children joined him. And her gratitude to her young teacher would have surely awakened love if she had been a few years older. When in March the term closed, not even the prize as best speller—a beautiful copy of the Pilgrim's Progress—consoled her.

As for the teacher, he was only glad the winter's work, which had been undertaken solely to furnish means for the pursuit of his profession, was over. He liked some of his scholars very much, Rachel especially, she was so intelligent, so grateful, and when, with blue eyes swimming in tears, she said good-bye, he did for a second feel sorry to leave her, and told her so.

"You ought to have seen Rache an' Susy cryin' when old Grey bid us good-bye," said Tom at home the evening of that last day of school.

"Did you cry!" asked Margaret.

"Guess not. I'm glad school's out. Hope I'll not have to go next winter," said Tom.

"I guess you won't," answered Margaret. "You're smart enough now, bub." She always called him "bub" when she wanted to vex him. "But old grey, as you call him, will make his mark in the world, see if he doesn't."

The entrance of Mr. Stillman closed the conversation, and Tom went out banging the door after him. No wonder Margaret was getting ill-natured. The winter was a long dull season in the Stillman home. Even her enjoyment at the few social gatherings she was allowed to attend in the neighborhood, was marred by the knowledge that she could not entertain her young friends in turn. Once or twice she had attempted to fix up the spare room and have a fire there for company but her father had forbidden it.

"I'd like to know," he said, "why the settin' room ain't good enough. If your company can't sit with the family they can stay away, Miss."

And "they" stayed away, generally, after one visit. Mr. Stillman was not a success as a host, especially for young people.

And a young minister who came home from meeting one Sunday with Elizabeth was so completely abashed by the cool reception he received that not even the daughter's pleading eyes could induce him to remain in the father's presence. A few weeks afterwards Elizabeth heard of his departure for a distant part of the state, and her face became sadder than ever.

Jim Lansing, the son of a widow neighbor, who managed a good sized farm and two grown sons with equal skill, was more successful.

He generally brought his mother along on his visits, and while she, with ready wit, entertained Mr. Stillman, Jim, the girls and the carpet rags escaped into the kitchen.

"But spring was near, and," thought Margaret, "he can't keep us out of the spare room in warm weather; and, besides, we will have all out-of-doors."

June came with her blue skies, her singing birds, her wealth of beauty. But there was no time at Stillman's to enjoy it. A larger crop than usual had been put in and extra hands employed. Not in the house. Why, there were five women, counting 10 year old Susy and the poor, delicate mother. What extra help could they need, although washing and cooking must be done for all the men? You see "hands" could be got for low wages if the farmer boarded them and had their washing done; and what else had the women to do! True, mother was not so strong as she used to be, but she did not complain. She was only more shadowy and quiet than ever; and Mr. Stillman told his daughters to "stir" around themselves, and not let mother do all the work.

"Oh, dear," said Margaret one morning as she and Rachel were bending over the washtubs while mother, Elizabeth and Susy did the churning and baking and prepared dinner, "I wish we could go to the picnic on the fourth; everybody's going."

"Maybe we can," said Rachel hopefully. "I heard father say he would not cut the wheat until about the sixth, and also, Margaret, I heard him say your calf was worth $10. If he gives you the money you can get a new white dress and I might wear your old one. It is so small for you."

Margaret laughed. "The calf is mine," said she "it would have died if I had not taken care of it, and father gave it to me so I will have a new dress and you shal have my old one."

Out in the barnyard, as the girls talked and worked, Mr. Stillman and Tom were putting the pretty calf in the wagon preparatory to taking it to the butcher.

When the girls went in to dinner the men had finished theirs and were lounging about in the shady yard enjoying their "nooning."

As they entered the dining room Mr. Stillman handed Margaret a package, saying: "There's your share of the calf, Margaret."

"My share!" she exclaimed, "why, the calf was all mine; at least, you said so."

As she spoke she opened the paper and unrolled a piece of cheap lawn, bright yellow, with blue flowers. With an angry gesture she threw it on the floor and left the room.

Mr. Stillman stood a moment amazed. Then turning to Rachel he said: "You can have the dress, Rachel, I'll teach Margaret a lesson."

"I don't want it," she said. "It was bought with Margaret's money. Why didn't you give her the money? When you sold Tom's pigs he had his money to do as he pleased with."

"Nice girls these of yours, mother," said Mr. Stillman to his frightened wife. "They'll be turning us out of doors next. You pick up that goods, Miss."

Rachel obediently took the lawn and began to fold it. "That calf was mine," he went on, "I only meant to pay Margaret for caring for it."

"You should have said so, then," answered his daughter, facing him with eyes as keen as his own, "but you told her if she could raise it she could have it, and, of course, she thought you meant what you said."

The father raised his hand as if to strike his child, then, as she did not drop her eyes, he turned and left the room.

July came, but the Stillman girls did not go to the picnic. Tom and the "hands" went, and Mrs. Lansing and her boys stopped at Stillman's on their way and offered the girls seats in their wagon, but the offer was not accepted. "The women folk," Mr. Stillman said, "had to get ready for the harvest hands," and there was more cooking and churning and washing as the days went on. No wonder Mrs. Stillman grew weaker, until even Mr. Stillman noticed it and brought her a bottle of bitters and told the girls to keep "mother out of the kitchen," which they, indeed, tried hard to do. But the mother could not rest. There was so much to do. The girls could not get along, and Elizabeth was not well, she knew, for the patient elder daughter seemed drooping, and a hopeless look had settled on her face as if for life.

At last there came a morning, about the middle of July, when mother did not rise to breakfast.

"Hadn't we better send for Dr. Lewis, father?" said Elizabeth.

"O, no, your mother did not sleep, it was so hot last night. She'll be up directly. Keep her out of the kitchen, and see you have a good dinner on time. We'll have to work to finish to-day, an' I am expectin' a storm; the air feels like it."

Twelve o'clock came. Dinner for a dozen hungry men was on the table, and still Mrs. Stillman was in bed."

While the men were eating Rachel slipped in to her mother. She found her awake, but her flushed cheeks and bright eyes startled the girl.

"O, mother," she cried, "you must have the doctor, you are so sick."

"No, no, dear," the mother answered, "father is too busy now, he couldn't take time. You run over to Mrs. Lansing after dinner. I'm not much sick, but I would like to see her."

Rachel returned to the dining room.

"Take that fly-brush, Rachel," said her father, "Susy's no account." Poor, tired little Susy crimsoned to the roots of her hair as she handed Rachel the brush.

When dinner was over Mr. Stillman glanced in his wife's room. She seemed sleeping and he did not go in. "Mother hasn't eaten a bite to-day, father," said Rachel. "I wish she'd have the doctor."

"Well," said Mr. Stillman impatiently, "if she's no better by mornin' I'll send for him." 36

Not stopping to eat Rachel went half a mile through the July sun for Mrs. Lansing. The men had gone to their work when she returned. Margaret was doing up the work and Elizabeth and Susy trying to make the poor sick woman comfortable by bathing her head and fanning her, while they begged her vainly to drink the tea they had brought her.

"Rachel," said Mrs. Lansing, "I saw Dr. Lewis' buggy coming down the road as I came here, you run out and stop him when he gets here."

When about 4 o'clock the rain began to fall in torrents Mr. Stillman had the satisfaction of seeing the last load of grain just inside the great barn door, and taking off his hat he wiped the moisture off his face, exclaiming, "Well, boys, we beat the rain; it can pour down now for all I care."

Replacing his hat on his head he turned toward the house, and to his surprise saw the well-known figure of Dr. Lewis on the porch. "Driven in by the rain," he thought; "guess I'll get him to see mother."

TO BE CONTINUED.

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