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MARTIN***



***TILLIE, A MENNONITE
MAID; A STORY
OF THE PENNSYLVANIA
DUTCH***

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Tillie, a Mennonite Maid; a Story of the Pennsylvania Dutch

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I

"OH, I LOVE HER! I LOVE HER!"

II

"I'M GOING TO LEARN YOU ONCE!"

III

"WHAT'S HURTIN' YOU, TILLIE?"

IV

"THE DOC" COMBINES BUSINESS AND PLEASURE

V

"NOVELS AIN'T MORAL, DOC!"

VI

JAKE GETZ IN A QUANDARY

VII

"THE LAST DAY OF PUMP-EYE"

VIII

MISS MARGARET'S ERRAND

IX

"I'LL DO MY DARN BEST, TEACHER!"

X

ADAM SCHUNK'S FUNERAL

XI

"POP! I FEEL TO BE PLAIN"

XII

ABSALOM KEEPS COMPANY

XIII

EZRA HERR, PEDAGOGUE

XIV

THE HARVARD GRADUATE

XV

THE WACKERNAGELS AT HOME

XVI

THE WACKERNAGELS "CONVERSE"

XVII

THE TEACHER MEETS ABSALOM

XVIII

TILLIE REVEALS HERSELF

XIX

TILLIE TELLS A LIE

XX

TILLIE IS "SET BACK"

XXI

"I'LL MARRY HIM TO-MORROW!"

XXII

THE DOC CONCOCTS A PLOT

XXIII

SUNSHINE AND SHADOW

XXIV

THE REVOLT OF TILLIE

XXV

GETZ "LEARNS" TILLIE

XXVI

TILLIE'S LAST FIGHT

I

"OH, I LOVE HER! I LOVE HER!"

[Table of Contents](#)

Tillie's slender little body thrilled with a peculiar ecstasy as she stepped upon the platform and felt her close proximity to the teacher—so close that she could catch the sweet, wonderful fragrance of her clothes and see the heave and fall of her bosom. Once Tillie's head had rested against that motherly bosom. She had fainted in school one morning after a day and evening of hard, hard work in her father's celery-beds, followed by a chastisement for being caught with a "story-book"; and she had come out of her faint to find herself in the heaven of sitting on Miss Margaret's lap, her head against her breast and Miss Margaret's soft hand smoothing her cheek and hair. And it was in that blissful moment that Tillie had discovered, for the first time in her young existence, that life could be worth while. Not within her memory had any one ever caressed her before, or spoken to her tenderly, and in that fascinating tone of anxious concern.

Afterward, Tillie often tried to faint again in school; but, such is Nature's perversity, she never could succeed.

School had just been called after the noon recess, and Miss Margaret was standing before her desk with a watchful eye on the troops of children crowding in from the playground to their seats, when the little girl stepped to her side on the platform.

This country school-house was a dingy little building in the heart of Lancaster County, the home of the Pennsylvania Dutch. Miss Margaret had been the teacher only a few months, and having come from Kentucky and not being "a Millersville Normal," she differed quite radically from any teacher they had ever had in New Canaan. Indeed, she was so wholly different from any one Tillie had ever seen in her life, that to the child's adoring heart she was nothing less than a miracle. Surely no one but Cinderella had ever been so beautiful! And how different, too, were her clothes from those of the other young ladies of New Canaan, and, oh, so much prettier—though not nearly so fancy; and she didn't "speak her words" as other people of Tillie's acquaintance spoke. To Tillie it was celestial music to hear Miss Margaret say, for instance, "buttah" when she meant butter-r-r, and "windo" for windah. "It gives her such a nice sound when she talks," thought Tillie.

Sometimes Miss Margaret's ignorance of the dialect of the neighborhood led to complications, as in her conversation just now with Tillie.

"Well?" she inquired, lifting the little girl's chin with her forefinger as Tillie stood at her side and thereby causing that small worshiper to blush with radiant pleasure. "What is it, honey?"

Miss Margaret always made Tillie feel that she LIKED her. Tillie wondered how Miss Margaret could like HER! What was there to like? No one had ever liked her before.

"It wonders me!" Tillie often whispered to herself with throbbing heart.

"Please, Miss Margaret," said the child, "pop says to ast you will you give me the darst to go home till half-past three this after?"

"If you go home till half-past three, you need not come back, honey—it wouldn't be worth while, when school closes at four."

"But I don't mean," said Tillie, in puzzled surprise, "that I want to go home and come back. I sayed whether I have the darst to go home till half-past three. Pop he's went to Lancaster, and he'll be back till half-past three a'ready, and he says then I got to be home to help him in the celery-beds."

Miss Margaret held her pretty head on one side, considering, as she looked down into the little girl's upturned face. "Is this a conundrum, Tillie? How your father be in Lancaster now and yet be home until half-past three? It's uncanny. Unless," she added, a ray of light coming to her,— "unless 'till' means BY. Your father will be home BY half-past three and wants you then?"

"Yes, ma'am. I can't talk just so right," said Tillie apologetically, "like what you can. Yes, sometimes I say my we's like my w's, yet!"

Miss Margaret laughed. "Bless your little heart!" she said, running her fingers through Tillie's hair. "But you would rather stay in school until four, wouldn't you, than go home to help your father in the celery-beds?"

"Oh, yes, ma'am," said Tillie wistfully, "but pop he has to get them beds through till Saturday market a'ready, and so we got to get 'em done behind Thursday or Friday yet."

"If I say you can't go home?"

Tillie colored all over her sensitive little face as, instead of answering, she nervously worked her toe into a crack in the platform.

"But your father can't blame YOU, honey, if I won't let you go home."

"He wouldn't stop to ast me was it my fault, Miss Margaret. If I wasn't there on time, he'd just—"

"All right, dear, you may go at half-past three, then," Miss Margaret gently said, patting the child's shoulder. "As soon as you have written your composition."

"Yes, ma'am, Miss Margaret."

It was hard for Tillie, as she sat at her desk that afternoon, to fix her wandering attention upon the writing of her composition, so fascinating was it just to revel idly in the sense of the touch of that loved hand that had stroked her hair, and the tone of that caressing voice that had called her "honey."

Miss Margaret always said to the composition classes, "Just try to write simply of what you see or feel, and then you will be sure to write a good 'composition.'"

Tillie was moved this afternoon to pour out on paper all that she "felt" about her divinity. But she had some misgivings as to the fitness of this.

She dwelt upon the thought of it, however, dreamily gazing out of the window near which she sat, into the blue sky of the October afternoon—until presently her ear was caught by the sound of Miss Margaret's voice speaking to Absalom Puntz, who stood at the foot of the composition class, now before her on the platform.

"You may read your composition, Absalom."

Absalom was one of "the big boys," but though he was sixteen years old and large for his age, his slowness in learning classed him with the children of twelve or thirteen. However, as learning was considered in New Canaan a superfluous and wholly unnecessary adjunct to the means of living, Absalom's want of agility in imbibing erudition never troubled him, nor did it in the least call forth the pity or contempt of his schoolmates.

Three times during the morning session he had raised his hand to announce stolidly to his long-suffering teacher, "I can't think of no subjeck"; and at last Miss Margaret had relaxed her Spartan resolution to make him do his own thinking and had helped him out.

"Write of something that is interesting you just at present. Isn't there some one thing you care more about than other things?" she had asked.

Absalom had stared at her blankly without replying.

"Now, Absalom," she had said desperately, "I think I know one thing you have been interested in lately—write me a composition on Girls."

Of course the school had greeted the advice with a laugh, and Miss Margaret had smiled with them, though she had not meant to be facetious.

Absalom, however, had taken her suggestion seriously.

"Is your composition written, Absalom?" she was asking as Tillie turned from the window, her contemplation of her own composition arrested by the sound of the voice which to her was the sweetest music in the world.

"No'm," sullenly answered Absalom. "I didn't get it through till it was time a'ready."

"But, Absalom, you've been at it this whole blessed day! You've not done another thing!"

"I wrote off some of it."

"Well," sighed Miss Margaret, "let us hear what you have done."

Absalom unfolded a sheet of paper and laboriously read:

"GIRLS

"The only thing I took particular notice to, about Girls, is that they are always picking lint off each other, still."

He stopped and slowly folded his paper.

"But go on," said Miss Margaret. "Read it all."

"That's all the fu'ther I got."

Miss Margaret looked at him for an instant, then suddenly lifted the lid of her desk, evidently to search for something. When she closed it her face was quite grave.

"We'll have the reading-lesson now," she announced.

Tillie tried to withdraw her attention from the teacher and fix it on her own work, but the gay, glad tone in which Lizzie Harnish was reading the lines,

"When thoughts
Of the last bitter hour come like a blight
Over thy spirit—"

hopelessly checked the flow of her ideas.

This class was large, and by the time Absalom's turn to read was reached, "Thanatopsis" had been finished, and so the first stanza of "The Bells" fell to him. It had transpired in the reading of "Thanatopsis" that a grave and solemn tone best suited that poem, and the value of this intelligence was

made manifest when, in a voice of preternatural solemnity, he read:

"What a world of merriment their melody foretells!"

Instantly, when he had finished his "stanza," Lizzie raised her hand to offer a criticism. "Absalom, he didn't put in no gestures."

Miss Margaret's predecessor had painstakingly trained his reading-classes in the Art of Gesticulation in Public Speaking, and Miss Margaret found the results of his labors so entertaining that she had never been able to bring herself to suppress the monstrosity.

"I don't like them gestures," sulkily retorted Absalom.

"Never mind the gestures," Miss Margaret consoled him—which indifference on her part seemed high treason to the well-trained class.

"I'll hear you read, now, the list of synonyms you found in these two poems," she added. "Lizzie may read first."

While the class rapidly leafed their readers to find their lists of synonyms, Miss Margaret looked up and spoke to Tillie, reminding her gently that that composition would not be written by half-past three if she did not hasten her work.

Tillie blushed with embarrassment at being caught in an idleness that had to be reproved, and resolutely bent all her powers to her task.

She looked about the room for a subject. The walls were adorned with the print portraits of "great men,"—former State superintendents of public instruction in Pennsylvania,—and with highly colored chromo portraits of Washington, Lincoln, Grant, and Garfield. Then there were a number of framed mottos: "Education rules in America," "Rely on

yourself," "God is our hope," "Dare to say No," "Knowledge is power," "Education is the chief defense of nations."

But none of these things made Tillie's genius to burn, and again her eyes wandered to the window and gazed out into the blue sky; and after a few moments she suddenly turned to her desk and rapidly wrote down her "subject"—"Evening."

The mountain of the opening sentence being crossed, the rest went smoothly enough, for Tillie wrote it from her heart.

"EVENING.

"I love to take my little sisters and brothers and go out, still, on a hill-top when the sun is setting so red in the West, and the birds are singing around us, and the cows are coming home to be milked, and the men are returning from their day's work.

"I would love to play in the evening if I had the dare, when the children are gay and everything around me is happy.

"I love to see the flowers closing their buds when the shades of evening are come. The thought has come to me, still, that I hope the closing of my life may come as quiet and peaceful as the closing of the flowers in the evening.

"MATILDA MARIA GETZ."

Miss Margaret was just calling for Absalom's synonyms when Tillie carried her composition to the desk, and Absalom was replying with his customary half-defiant sullenness.

"My pop he sayed I ain't got need to waste my time gettin' learnt them cinnamons. Pop he says what's the use learnin' TWO words where [which] means the selfsame thing—one's enough."

Absalom's father was a school director and Absalom had grown accustomed, under the rule of Miss Margaret's predecessors, to feel the force of the fact in their care not to offend him.

"But your father is not the teacher here—I am," she cheerfully told him. "So you may stay after school and do what I require."

Tillie felt a pang of uneasiness as she went back to her seat. Absalom's father was very influential and, as all the township knew, very spiteful. He could send Miss Margaret away, and he would do it, if she offended his only child, Absalom. Tillie thought she could not bear it at all if Miss Margaret were sent away. Poor Miss Margaret did not seem to realize her own danger. Tillie felt tempted to warn her. It was only this morning that the teacher had laughed at Absalom when he said that the Declaration of Independence was "a treaty between the United States and England,"—and had asked him, "Which country, do you think, hurrahed the loudest, Absalom, when that treaty was signed?" And now this afternoon she "as much as said Absalom's father should mind to his own business!" It was growing serious. There had never been before a teacher at William Penn school-house who had not judiciously "showed partiality" to Absalom.

"And he used to be dummer yet [stupider even] than what he is now," thought Tillie, remembering vividly a

school entertainment that had been given during her own first year at school, when Absalom, nine years old, had spoken his first piece. His pious Methodist grandmother had endeavored to teach him a little hymn to speak on the great occasion, while his frivolous aunt from the city of Lancaster had tried at the same time to teach him "Bobby Shafto." New Canaan audiences were neither discriminating nor critical, but the assembly before which little Absalom had risen to "speak his piece off," had found themselves confused when he told them that

"On Jordan's bank the Baptist stands,
Silver buckles on his knee."

Tillie would never forget her own infantine agony of suspense as she sat, a tiny girl of five, in the audience, listening to Absalom's mistakes. But Eli Darmstetter, the teacher, had not scolded him.

Then there was the time that Absalom had forced a fight at recess and had made little Adam Oberholzer's nose bleed—it was little Adam (whose father was not at that time a school director) that had to stay after school; and though every one knew it wasn't fair, it had been accepted without criticism, because even the young rising generation of New Canaan understood the impossibility and folly of quarreling with one's means of earning money.

But Miss Margaret appeared to be perfectly blind to the perils of her position. Tillie was deeply troubled about it.

At half-past three, when, at a nod from Miss Margaret the little girl left her desk to go home, a wonderful thing happened—Miss Margaret gave her a story-book.

"You are so fond of reading, Tillie, I brought you this. You may take it home, and when you have read it, bring it back to me, and I'll give you something else to read."

Delighted as Tillie was to have the book for its own sake, it was yet greater happiness to handle something belonging to Miss Margaret and to realize that Miss Margaret had thought so much about her as to bring it to her.

"It's a novel, Tillie. Have you ever read a novel?"

"No'm. Only li-bries."

"What?"

"Sunday-school li-bries. Us we're Evangelicals, and us children we go to the Sunday-school, and I still bring home li-bry books. Pop he don't uphold to novel-readin'. I have never saw a novel yet."

"Well, this book won't injure you, Tillie. You must tell me all about it when you have read it. You will find it so interesting, I'm afraid you won't be able to study your lessons while you are reading it."

Outside the school-room, Tillie looked at the title,—Ivanhoe,"—and turned over the pages in an ecstasy of anticipation.

"Oh! I love her! I love her!" throbbed her little hungry heart.

II

"I'M GOING TO LEARN YOU ONCE!"

Table of Contents

Tillie was obliged, when about a half-mile from her father's farm, to hide her precious book. This she did by pinning her petticoat into a bag and concealing the book in it. It was in this way that she always carried home her "libraries" from Sunday-school, for all story-book reading was prohibited by her father. It was uncomfortable walking along the highroad with the book knocking against her legs at every step, but that was not so painful as her father's punishment would be did he discover her bringing home a "novel"! She was not permitted to bring home even a school-book, and she had greatly astonished Miss Margaret, one day at the beginning of the term, by asking, "Please, will you leave me let my books in school? Pop says I darsen't bring 'em home."

"What you can't learn in school, you can do without," Tillie's father had said. "When you're home you'll work fur your wittles."

Tillie's father was a frugal, honest, hard-working, and very prosperous Pennsylvania Dutch farmer, who thought he religiously performed his parental duty in bringing up his many children in the fear of his heavy hand, in unceasing labor, and in almost total abstinence from all amusement and self-indulgence. Far from thinking himself cruel, he was convinced that the oftener and the more vigorously he applied "the strap," the more conscientious a parent was he.

His wife, Tillie's stepmother, was as submissive to his authority as were her five children and Tillie. Apathetic, anemic, overworked, she yet never dreamed of considering herself or her children abused, accepting her lot as the

natural one of woman, who was created to be a child-bearer, and to keep man well fed and comfortable. The only variation from the deadly monotony of her mechanical and unceasing labor was found in her habit of irritability with her stepchild. She considered Tillie "a doppel" (a stupid, awkward person); for though usually a wonderful little household worker, Tillie, when very much tired out, was apt to drop dishes; and absent-mindedly she would put her sunbonnet instead of the bread into the oven, or pour molasses instead of batter on the griddle. Such misdemeanors were always plaintively reported by Mrs. Getz to Tillie's father, who, without fail, conscientiously applied what he considered the undoubted cure.

In practising the strenuous economy prescribed by her husband, Mrs. Getz had to manoeuvre very skilfully to keep her children decently clothed, and Tillie in this matter was a great help to her; for the little girl possessed a precocious skill in combining a pile of patches into a passably decent dress or coat for one of her little brothers or sisters. Nevertheless, it was invariably Tillie who was slighted in the small expenditures that were made each year for the family clothing. The child had always really preferred that the others should have "new things" rather than herself—until Miss Margaret came; and now, before Miss Margaret's daintiness, she felt ashamed of her own shabby appearance and longed unspeakably for fresh, pretty clothes. Tillie knew perfectly well that her father had plenty of money to buy them for her if he would. But she never thought of asking him or her stepmother for anything more than what they saw fit to give her.

The Getz family was a perfectly familiar type among the German farming class of southeastern Pennsylvania. Jacob Getz, though spoken of in the neighborhood as being "wonderful near," which means very penurious, and considered by the more gentle-minded Amish and Mennonites of the township to be "overly strict" with his family and "too ready with the strap still," was nevertheless highly respected as one who worked hard and was prosperous, lived economically, honestly, and in the fear of the Lord, and was "laying by."

The Getz farm was typical of the better sort to be found in that county. A neat walk, bordered by clam shells, led from a wooden gate to the porch of a rather large, and severely plain frame house, facing the road. Every shutter on the front and sides of the building was tightly closed, and there was no sign of life about the place. A stranger, ignorant of the Pennsylvania Dutch custom of living in the kitchen and shutting off the "best rooms,"—to be used in their mustiness and stiff unhomelikeness on Sunday only,—would have thought the house temporarily empty. It was forbiddingly and uncompromisingly spick-and-span.

A grass-plot, ornamented with a circular flower-bed, extended a short distance on either side of the house. But not too much land was put to such unproductive use; and the small lawn was closely bordered by a corn-field on the one side and on the other by an apple orchard. Beyond stretched the tobacco—and wheat-fields, and behind the house were the vegetable garden and the barn-yard.

Arrived at home by half-past three, Tillie hid her "Ivanhoe" under the pillow of her bed when she went up-

stairs to change her faded calico school dress for the yet older garment she wore at her work.

If she had not been obliged to change her dress, she would have been puzzled to know how to hide her book, for she could not, without creating suspicion, have gone up-stairs in the daytime. In New Canaan one never went up-stairs during the day, except at the rare times when obliged to change one's clothes. Every one washed at the pump and used the one family roller-towel hanging on the porch. Miss Margaret, ever since her arrival in the neighborhood, had been the subject of wide-spread remark and even suspicion, because she "washed up-stairs" and even sat up-stairs!—in her bedroom! It was an unheard-of proceeding in New Canaan.

Tillie helped her father in the celery-beds until dark; then, weary, but excited at the prospect of her book, she went in from the fields and up-stairs to the little low-roofed bed-chamber which she shared with her two half-sisters. They were already in bed and asleep, as was their mother in the room across the hall, for every one went to bed at sundown in Canaan Township, and got up at sunrise.

Tillie was in bed in a few minutes, rejoicing in the feeling of the book under her pillow. Not yet dared she venture to light a candle and read it—not until she should hear her father's heavy snoring in the room across the hall.

The candles which she used for this surreptitious reading of Sunday-school "li-bries" and any other chance literature which fell in her way, were procured with money paid to her by Miss Margaret for helping her to clean the school-room on Friday afternoons after school. Tillie would have been

happy to help her for the mere joy of being with her, but Miss Margaret insisted upon paying her ten cents for each such service.

The little girl was obliged to resort to a deep-laid plot in order to do this work for the teacher. It had been her father's custom—ever since, at the age of five, she had begun to go to school—to "time" her in coming home at noon and afternoon, and whenever she was not there on the minute, to mete out to her a dose of his ever-present strap.

"I ain't havin' no playin' on the way home, still! When school is done, you come right away home then, to help me or your mom, or I 'll learn you once!"

But it happened that Miss Margaret, in her reign at "William Perm" school-house, had introduced the innovation of closing school on Friday afternoons at half-past three instead of four, and Tillie, with bribes of candy bought with part of her weekly wage of ten cents, secured secrecy as to this innovation from her little sister and brother who went to school with her—making them play in the school-grounds until she was ready to go home with them.

Before Miss Margaret had come to New Canaan, Tillie had done her midnight reading by the light of the kerosene lamp which, after every one was asleep, she would bring up from the kitchen to her bedside. But this was dangerous, as it often led to awkward inquiries as to the speedy consumption of the oil. Candles were safer. Tillie kept them and a box of matches hidden under the mattress.

It was eleven o'clock when at last the child, trembling with mingled delight and apprehension, rose from her bed, softly closed her bedroom door, and with extremely

judicious carefulness lighted her candle, propped up her pillow, and settled down to read as long as she should be able to hold her eyes open. The little sister at her side and the one in the bed at the other side of the room slept too soundly to be disturbed by the faint flickering light of that one candle.

To-night her stolen pleasure proved more than usually engrossing. At first the book was interesting principally because of the fact, so vividly present with her, that Miss Margaret's eyes and mind had moved over every word and thought which, she was now absorbing. But soon her intense interest in the story excluded every other idea—even the fear of discovery. Her young spirit was "out of the body" and following, as in a trance, this tale, the like of which she had never before read.

The clock down-stairs in the kitchen struck twelve—one—two, but Tillie never heard it. At half-past two o'clock in the morning, when the tallow candle was beginning to sputter to its end, she still was reading, her eyes bright as stars, her usually pale face flushed with excitement, her sensitive lips parted in breathless interest—when, suddenly, a stinging blow of "the strap" on her shoulders brought from her a cry of pain and fright.

"What you mean, doin' somepin like, this yet!" sternly demanded her father. "What fur book's that there?"

He took the book from her hands and Tillie cowered beneath the covers, the wish flashing through her mind that the book could change into a Bible as he looked at it!—which miracle would surely temper the punishment that in a moment she knew would be meted out to her.

"'Iwanhoe'—a novel! A NOVEL!" he said in genuine horror. "Tillie, where d'you get this here!"

Tillie knew that if she told lies she would go to hell, but she preferred to burn in torment forever rather than betray Miss Margaret; for her father, like Absalom's, was a school director, and if he knew Miss Margaret read novels and lent them to the children, he would surely force her out of "William Penn."

"I lent it off of Elviny Dinkleberger!" she sobbed.

"You know I tole you a'ready you darsen't bring books home! And you know I don't uphold to novel-readin'! I 'll have to learn you to mind better 'n this! Where d' you get that there candle?"

"I—bought it, pop."

"Bought? Where d'you get the money!"

Tillie did not like the lies she had to tell, but she knew she had already perjured her soul beyond redemption and one lie more or less could not make matters worse.

"I found it in the road."

"How much did you find?"

"Fi' cents."

"You hadn't ought to spent it without astin' me dare you. Now I'm goin' to learn you once! Set up."

Tillie obeyed, and the strap fell across her shoulders. Her outcries awakened the household and started the youngest little sister, in her fright and sympathy with Tillie, to a high-pitched wailing. The rest of them took the incident phlegmatically, the only novelty about it being the strange hour of its happening.

But the hardest part of her punishment was to follow.

"Now this here book goes in the fire!" her father announced when at last his hand was stayed. "And any more that comes home goes after it in the stove, I'll see if you 'll mind your pop or not!"

Left alone in her bed, her body quivering, her little soul hot with shame and hatred, the child stifled her sobs in her pillow, her whole heart one bleeding wound.

How could she ever tell Miss Margaret? Surely she would never like her any more!—never again lay her hand on her hair, or praise her compositions, or call her "honey," or, even, perhaps, allow her to help her on Fridays!—and what, then, would be the use of living? If only she could die and be dead like a cat or a bird and not go to hell, she would take the carving-knife and kill herself! But there was hell to be taken into consideration. And yet, could hell hold anything worse than the loss of Miss Margaret's kindness? HOW could she tell her of that burned-up book and endure to see her look at her with cold disapproval? Oh, to make such return for her kindness, when she so longed with all her soul to show her how much she loved her!

For the first time in all her school-days, Tillie went next morning with reluctance to school.

III

"WHAT'S HURTIN' YOU, TILLIE?"

[Table of Contents](#)

She meant to make her confession as soon as she reached the school-house—and have it over—but Miss Margaret was busy writing on the blackboard, and Tillie felt an immense relief at the necessary postponement of her ordeal to recess time.

The hours of that morning were very long to her heavy heart, and the minutes dragged to the time of her doom—for nothing but blackness lay beyond the point of the acknowledgment which must turn her teacher's fondness to dislike.

She saw Miss Margaret's eyes upon her several times during the morning, with that look of anxious concern which had so often fed her starved affections. Yes, Miss Margaret evidently could see that she was in trouble and she was feeling sorry for her. But, alas, when she should learn the cause of her misery, how surely would that look turn to coldness and displeasure!

Tillie felt that she was ill preparing the way for her dread confession in the very bad recitations she made all morning. She failed in geography—every question that came to her; she failed to understand Miss Margaret's explanation of compound interest, though the explanation was gone over a third time for her especial benefit; she missed five words in spelling and two questions in United States history!

"Tillie, Tillie!" Miss Margaret solemnly shook her head, as she closed her book at the end of the last recitation before recess. "Too much 'Ivanhoe,' I'm afraid! Well, it's my fault, isn't it?"

The little girl's blue eyes gazed up at her with a look of such anguish, that impulsively Miss Margaret drew her to

her side, as the rest of the class moved away to their seats.

"What's the matter, dear?" she asked. "Aren't you well? You look pale and ill! What is it, Tillie?"

Tillie's overwrought heart could bear no more. Her head fell on Miss Margaret's shoulder as she broke into wildest crying. Her body quivered with her gasping sobs and her little hands clutched convulsively at Miss Margaret's gown.

"You poor little thing!" whispered Miss Margaret, her arms about the child; "WHAT'S the matter with you, honey? There, there, don't cry so—tell me what's the matter."

It was such bliss to be petted like this—to feel Miss Margaret's arms about her and hear that loved voice so close to her!—for the last time! Never again after this moment would she be liked and caressed! Her heart was breaking and she could not answer for her sobbing.

"Tillie, dear, sit down here in my chair until I send the other children out to recess—and then you and I can have a talk by ourselves," Miss Margaret said, leading the child a step to her arm-chair on the platform. She stood beside the chair, holding Tillie's throbbing head to her side, while she tapped the bell which dismissed the children.

"Now," she said, when the door had closed on the last of them and she had seated herself and drawn Tillie to her again, "tell me what you are crying for, little girlie."

"Miss Margaret!" Tillie's words came in hysterical, choking gasps; "you won't never like me no more when I tell you what's happened, Miss Margaret!"

"Why, dear me, Tillie, what on earth is it?"

"I didn't mean to do it, Miss Margaret! And I'll redd up for you, Fridays, still, till it's paid for a'ready, Miss Margaret, if

you'll leave me, won't you, please? Oh, won't you never like me no more?"

"My dear little goosie, what IS the matter with you? Come," she said, taking the little girl's hand reassuringly in both her own, "tell me, child."

A certain note of firmness in her usually drawling Southern voice checked a little the child's hysterical emotion. She gulped the choking lump in her throat and answered.

"I was readin' 'Ivanhoe' in bed last night, and pop woke up, and seen my candle-light, and he conceited he'd look once and see what it was, and then he seen me, and he don't uphold to novel-readin', and he—he—"

"Well?" Miss Margaret gently urged her faltering speech.

"He whipped me and—and burnt up your Book!"

"Whipped you again!" Miss Margaret's soft voice indignantly exclaimed. "The br—" she checked herself and virtuously closed her lips. "I'm so sorry, Tillie, that I got you into such a scrape!"

Tillie thought Miss Margaret could not have heard her clearly.

"He—burnt up your book yet, Miss Margaret!" she found voice to whisper again.

"Indeed! I ought to make him pay for it!"

"He didn't know it was yourn, Miss Margaret—he don't uphold to novel-readin', and if he'd know it was yourn he'd have you put out of William Penn, so I tole him I lent it off of Elviny Dinkleberger—and I'll help you Fridays till it's paid for a'ready, if you'll leave me, Miss Margaret!"

She lifted pleading eyes to the teacher's face, to see therein a look of anger such as she had never before beheld in that gentle countenance—for Miss Margaret had caught sight of the marks of the strap on Tillie's bare neck, and she was flushed with indignation at the outrage. But Tillie, interpreting the anger to be against herself, turned as white as death, and a look of such hopeless woe came into her face that Miss Margaret suddenly realized the dread apprehension torturing the child.

"Come here to me, you poor little thing!" she tenderly exclaimed, drawing the little girl into her lap and folding her to her heart. "I don't care anything about the BOOK, honey! Did you think I would? There, there—don't cry so, Tillie, don't cry. I love you, don't you know I do!"—and Miss Margaret kissed the child's quivering lips, and with her own fragrant handkerchief wiped the tears from her cheeks, and with her soft, cool fingers smoothed back the hair from her hot forehead.

And this child, who had never known the touch of a mother's hand and lips, was transported in that moment from the suffering of the past night and morning, to a happiness that made this hour stand out to her, in all the years that followed, as the one supreme experience of her childhood.

Ineffable tenderness of the mother heart of woman!

That afternoon, when Tillie got home from school,—ten minutes late according to the time allowed her by her father,—she was quite unable to go out to help him in the field. Every step of the road home had been a dragging burden to her aching limbs, and the moment she reached

the farm-house, she tumbled in a little heap upon the kitchen settee and lay there, exhausted and white, her eyes shining with fever, her mouth parched with thirst, her head throbbing with pain—feeling utterly indifferent to the consequences of her tardiness and her failure to meet her father in the field.

"Ain't you feelin' good?" her stepmother phlegmatically inquired from across the room, where she sat with a dish-pan in her lap, paring potatoes for supper.

"No, ma'am," weakly answered Tillie.

"Pop 'll be looking fur you out in the field."

Tillie wearily closed her eyes and did not answer.

Mrs. Getz looked up from her pan and let her glance rest for an instant upon the child's white, pained face. "Are you feelin' too mean to go help pop?"

"Yes, ma'am. I—can't!" gasped Tillie, with a little sob.

"You ain't lookin' good," the woman reluctantly conceded. "Well, I'll leave you lay a while. Mebbe pop used the strap too hard last night. He sayed this dinner that he was some uneasy that he used the strap so hard—but he was that wonderful spited to think you'd set up readin' a novel-book in the night-time yet! You might of knew you'd ketch an awful lickin' fur doin' such a dumm thing like what that was. Sammy!" she called to her little eight-year-old son, who was playing on the kitchen porch, "you go out and tell pop Tillie she's got sick fur me, and I'm leavin' her lay a while. Now hurry on, or he'll come in here to see, once, ain't she home yet, or what. Go on now!"

Sammy departed on his errand, and Mrs. Getz diligently resumed her potato-paring.