

The Story of Waitstill Baxter

By KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

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SYNOPSIS

Waitstill Baxter and her sister, Patience (Patty), keep house for their widowed, mean father, Ivory Boynton, whose father disappeared, is interested in Waitstill. He takes care of his daft mother.

(Continued next week.)

CHAPTER II.

Deacon Baxter's Wives.

Waitstill frowned, but did not interfere further with Patty's intemperate speech. She knew that she was simply serving as an escape valve and that after the steam was "let off" she would be more rational.

"Of course we are motherless," continued Patty wistfully, "but poor Ivory is worse than motherless."

"No, not worse, Patty," said Waitstill, taking the bread board and moving toward the closet. "Ivory loves his mother, and she loves him with all the mind she has left. She has the best blood of New England flowing in her veins, and I suppose it was a great comedown for her to marry Aaron Boynton, clever and gifted though he was. Now Ivory has to protect her poor, daft, innocent creature—and hide her away from the gossip of the village. He is surely the best of sons, Ivory Boynton."

"She is a terrible care for him and like to spoil his life," said Patty. "There are cares that swell the heart and make it bigger and warmer, Patty. Just as there are cares that shrivel it and leave it tired and cold. Love lightens Ivory's afflictions, but that is something you and I have to do without, so it seems."

"I suppose little Rodman is some comfort to the Boyntons, even if he is only ten?" Patty suggested.

"No doubt. He's a good little fellow, and, though it's rather hard for Ivory to be burdened for these last five years with the support of a child who's no nearer kin than a cousin, still he's of use, minding Mrs. Boynton and the house when Ivory's away. The schoolteacher says he is wonderful at his books and likely to be a great credit to the Boyntons some day or other."

"You've forgot to name our one great blessing, Waity, and I believe, anyway, you're talking to keep my mind off the earrings!"

"You mean we've each other? No, Patty, I never forget that, day or night. 'Tis that makes me willing to bear any burden father chooses to put upon us. Now the bread is set, but I don't believe I have the courage to put a needle into your tender flesh, Patty. I really don't."

"Nonsense! I've got the waxed silk all ready and chosen the right sized needle, and I'll promise not to jump or screech more than I can help. We'll make a tiny lead pencil dot right in the middle of the lobe, then you place the needle on it, shut your eyes and jab hard! I expect to faint, but when I 'come to' we can decide which of us will pull the needle through to the other side. Probably it will be you. I'm such a coward. If it hurts dreadfully I'll have only one pierced today and take the other tomorrow, and if it hurts very dreadfully perhaps I'll go through life with one earring. Aunt Abby Cole will say it's just odd enough to suit me!"

"You'll never go through life with one tongue at the rate you use it now," chided Waitstill, "for it will never last you. Come, we'll take the workbasket and go out in the barn where no one will see or hear us."

He was thought a sharp and shrewd trader, but his honesty was never questioned, indeed, the only trait in his character that ever came up for general discussion was his extraordinary, unbelievable, colossal meanness. This so eclipsed every other passion in the man and loomed so bulky and insistently in the foreground that had he cherished a second vice no one would have observed it, and if he really did possess a casual virtue it could scarcely have reared its head in such ugly company.

It might be said, to defend the fair fame of the church, that Mr. Baxter's deaconhood did not include very active service in the courts of the Lord. He had "experienced religion" at fifteen and made profession of his faith, but all well brought up boys and girls did the same in those days—their parents saw to that! If change of conviction or backsliding occurred later on that was not their business! At the ripe age of twenty-five he was selected to fill a vacancy and became a deacon, thinking it might be good for trade, as it was, for some years. He was very active at the time of the "Cochrane craze," since any defense of the creed that included lively detective work and incessant spying on his neighbors was particularly in his line, but for many years now, though he had been regular in attendance at church, he had never officiated at communion and his deaconal services had gradually lapsed into the passing of the contribution box, a task of which he never wearied. It was such a keen pleasure to make other people yield their pennies for a good cause without adding his own!

Deacon Baxter had now been a widower for nine years, and the community had almost relinquished the idea of his seeking a fourth wife. This was a matter of some regret, for there was a general feeling that it would be a good thing for the Baxter girls to have some one to help with the housework and act as a buffer between them and their grim and irascible parent. As for the women of the village, they were mortified that the Deacon had been able to secure three wives and refused to believe that the universe held anywhere a creature brightenough to become his fourth.

The first, he it said, was a mere ignorant girl, and he a beardless youth of twenty, who may not have shown his true qualities so early in life. She bore him two sons, and it was a matter of comment at the time that she called them, respectively, Job and Moses, hoping that the endurance and meekness connected with these names might somehow help them in their future relations with their father. Pneumonia, coupled with profound discouragement, carried her off in a few years to make room for the second wife, Waitstill's mother, who was of different fiber and greatly his superior. She was a fine, handsome girl, the orphan daughter of up country gentlemen who had died when she was eighteen, leaving her alone in the world and penniless.

Baxter, after a few days' acquaintance, drove into the dooryard of the house where she was a visitor and, showing her his two curly headed boys, suddenly asked her to come and be their stepmother. She assented, partly because she had nothing else to do with her existence so far as she could see, and also because she fell in love with the children at first sight and forgot, as girls will, that it was their father whom she was marrying.

She was as plucky and clever and spirited as she was handsome, and she made a brave fight of it with Foxy, long enough to bring a daughter into the world, to name her Waitstill and start her a little way on her life journey—then she, too, gave up the struggle and died. Typhoid fever it was, combined with complete loss of illusions and a kind of despairing rage at having made so complete a failure of her existence.

The next year Mr. Baxter, being unusually busy, offered a man a good young heifer if he would jog about the country a little and pick him up a housekeeper, a likely woman who would if she proved energetic, economical and amiable be eventually raised to the proud position of his wife. If she was young, healthy, smart, tidy, capable and a good manager, able to milk the cows, harness the horse and make good butter he would give a dollar and a half a week. The woman was found, and, incredible as it may seem, she said "Yes" when the deacon, whose ardor was kindled at having paid three months' wages, proposed a speedy marriage. The two boys by this time had reached the age of discretion, and one of them evinced the fact by promptly running away to parts unknown, never to be heard from afterward; while the other, a reckless and unhappy lad, was drowned while running on the logs in the river. Old Foxy showed little outward sign of his loss.

His third wife, the one originally secured for a housekeeper, bore him a girl, very much to his disgust, a girl named Patience, and great was Waitstill's delight at this addition to the dull household. The mother was a timid, colorless, docile creature, but Patience nevertheless was a sparkling, bright eyed baby, who speedily became the very center of the universe to the older child. So the months and years wore on drearily enough until when Patience was eight the third Mrs. Baxter succumbed after the manner of her predecessors and slipped away from a life that had grown intolerable. The trouble was diagnosed as "liver complaint," but scarcity of proper food, no new frocks or kind words, hard work and continual bullying may possibly have been contributory causes. Dr. Perry thought so, for he had witnessed three most contented deaths in the Baxter house. The ladies were all members of the church and had presumably made their peace with God, but the good doctor fancied that their

pleasure in joining the angels was mild compared with their relief at parting with the deacon.

"I know I hadn't ought to put the care on you, Waitstill, and you only fourteen," poor Mrs. Baxter sighed, as the young girl was watching with her one night when the end seemed drawing near. "I've made out to live till now when Patience is old enough to dress herself and help round, but I'm all beat out and can't try any more."

"Do you mean I'm to take your place, be a mother to Patience and keep house and everything?" asked Waitstill quaveringly.

"I don't see but you'll have to, unless your father marries again. He'll never hire help, you know that!" "I won't have another mother in this house," flashed the girl. "There's been three here and that's enough! If he brings anybody home I'll take Patience and run away, as Job did, or if he leaves me alone I'll wash and iron and scrub and cook till Patience grows up, and then we'll go off together and hide somewhere. I'm fourteen. Oh, mother, how soon could I be married and take Patience to live with me? Do you think anybody will ever want me?"

"Don't marry for a hour, Waitstill! Your own mother did that, and so did I, and we were both punished for it! You've been a great help, and I've had a sight of comfort out of the baby, but I wouldn't go through it again, not even for her! You're real smart and capable for your age, and you've done your full share of the work every day, even when you were at school. You can get along all right."

"I don't know how I'm going to do everything alone," said the girl, forcing back her tears. "You've always made the brown bread, and mine will never suit father. I suppose I can wash, but I don't know how to iron starched clothes, nor make pickles, and oh! I can never kill a rooster, mother, it's no use to ask me to! I'm not big enough to be the head of the family."

Mrs. Baxter turned her pale, tired face away from Waitstill's appealing eyes.

"I know," she said faintly, "I hate to leave you to bear the brunt alone, but I must! * * * Take good care of Patience and don't let her get into trouble. * * * You won't, will you?"

"I'll be careful," promised Waitstill, sobbing quietly. "I'll do my best." "You've got more courage than ever I had; don't you s'pose you can stiffen up and defend yourself a little mite? Your father'd ought to be opposed, for his own good, but I've never seen anybody that dared do it." Then, after a pause, she said with a flash of spirit, "Anyhow, Waitstill, he's your father after all. He's no blood relation of mine, and I can't stand him another day; that's the reason I'm willing to die."

Ivory Boynton lifted the bars that divided his land from the highroad and walked slowly toward the house. It was April, but there were still patches of snow here and there, fast melting under a drizzling rain. It was a gray world, a bleak, black and brown world, above and below. The sky was leaden; the road and the footpath were deep in a muddy ooze flecked with white. The tree trunks, black, with bare branches, were outlined against the gray sky; nevertheless, spring had been on the way for a week, and a few sunny days would bring the yearly miracle for which all hearts were longing.

Ivory was season wise, and his quick eye had caught many a sign as he walked through the woods from his schoolhouse. A new and different color haunted the tree tops, and one had only to look closely at the elm buds to see that they were beginning to swell. Some fat robins had been bouncing about in the schoolyard at noon, and the sparrows had been chirping and twittering on the fence rails. Yes, the winter was over, and Ivory was glad, for it had meant no coasting and skating and sleighing for him, but long walks in deep snow or slush, long evenings, good for study, but short days and greater loneliness for his mother. He could see her now as he neared the house, standing in the open doorway, her hand shading her eyes, watching, always watching, for some one who never came.

"Spring is on the way, mother, but it" (Continued on page 7, Col. 1)

Nature's Objection Lesson

In almost every community will be found some one woman who is a splendid example of perfect health. She knows nothing of diseases which afflict most women. Motherhood to her is pure joy with scarce a pain-pang to mar it. She can enjoy life to the full, eat heartily, sleep soundly and throw her whole energy into work or play as it may happen. That woman is Nature's object lesson. She has no privilege above any other member of her sex. No rights that do not belong to every woman. This fact has been proven in thousands of cases in which women have been lifted from misery up to the high level of robust health by the use of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. The possibilities of perfect health inhere in every woman. Its development is obstructed by local diseases. "Favorite Prescription" removes the obstruction and makes weak women strong and sick women well.



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The Centre County Banking Co. BELLEFONTE PA.

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Rummage Table. Shirt Waist and Dress Patterns on this table at less than actual cost, also a line of Muslin Underwear. Everything on this table must go regardless of cost

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