

# 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.

Mrs. Boynton expects her husband to return. Rodman, a young boy, is a member of the Boynton household.

Ivory's father abandoned his family to follow Jacob Cochrane, a mystic. Patience chafes under her father's stern rule.

[Continued next week.]

Mrs. Boynton's hair, that had been in her youth like an aureole of corn silk, was now a strange yellow white, and her blue eyes looked out from her pale face with a helpless appeal.

"You and I were living alone here after father went away," Ivory began. "I was a little boy, you know. You and father had saved something, there was the farm, you worked like a slave, I helped, and we lived somehow, do you remember?"

"I do indeed. It was cold, and the neighbors were cruel. Jacob Cochrane had gone away, and his disciples were not always true to him. When the magnetism of his presence was withdrawn they could not follow all his revelations, and they forgot how he had awakened their spiritual life at the first of his preaching. Your father was always a staunch believer, but when he started on his mission and went to Parsonsfield to help Elder Cochrane in his meetings the neighbors began to criticize him. They doubted him. You were too young to realize it, but I did, and it almost broke my heart."

"I was nearly twelve years old. Do you think I escaped all the gossip, mother?"

"You never spoke of it to me, Ivory."

"No, there is much that I never spoke of to you, mother, but some time when you grow stronger and your memory is better we will talk together. Do you remember the winter, long after father went away, that Parson Lane sent me to Fairfield academy to get enough Greek and Latin to make me a school-master?"

"Yes," she answered uncertainly.

"Don't you remember I got a free ride downriver one Friday and came home for Sunday, just to surprise you? And when I got here I found you ill in bed, with Mrs. Mason and Dr. Perry taking care of you. You could not speak, you were so ill, but they told me you had been up in New Hampshire to see your sister, that she had died, and that you had brought back her boy, who was only four years old. That was Rod. I took him into bed with me that night, poor, homesick little fellow, and, as you know, mother he's never left us since."

"I didn't remember I had a sister. Is she dead, Ivory?" asked Mrs. Boynton vaguely.

"If she were not dead do you suppose you would have kept Rodman with us when we hadn't bread enough for our own two mouths, mother?" questioned Ivory patiently.

"No, of course not. I can't think how I can be so forgetful. It's worse sometimes than others. It's worse today because I knew the mayflowers were blooming, and that reminded me it was time for your father to come home. You must forgive me, dear, and will you excuse me if I sit in the kitchen awhile? The window by the side door looks out toward the road, and if I put a candle on the sill it shines quite a distance. The lane is such a long one, and your father was always a sad stumbler in the dark! I shouldn't like him to think I wasn't looking for him when he's been gone since January."

Ivory's pipe went out, and his book slipped from his knee unnoticed.

His mother was more confused than usual, but she always was when spring came to remind her of her husband's promise. Somehow, well used as he was to her mental wanderings, they made him uneasy tonight. His father had left home on a fancied mission, a duty he believed to be a revelation given by God through Jacob Cochrane. The farm did not miss him much at first. Ivory reflected bitterly, for since his fanatical espousal of Cochrane's his father's interest in such mundane matters as household expenses had diminished month by month until they had no meaning for him at all. Letters to wife and boy had come at first, but after six months, during which he had written from many places, continually deferring the date of his return, they had ceased altogether. The rest was silence. Rumors of his presence here or there came from time to time; but, though Parson Lane and Dr. Perry did their best, none of them were ever substantiated.

Where had those years of wandering been passed, and had they all been given even to an imaginary and fantastic service of God? Was his father dead? If he were alive, what could keep him from writing? Nothing but a very strong reason or a very wrong one, so his son thought at times.

Since Ivory had grown to man's estate he understood that in the later days of Cochrane's preaching his "visions," "inspirations" and "revelations" concerning the marriage bond were a trifle startling from the old fashioned, orthodox point of view. His most advanced disciples were to hold themselves in readiness to renounce their former vows and seek "spiritual consorts," sometimes according to his advice, sometimes as their inclinations prompted.

Had Aaron Boynton forsaken willingly the wife of his youth, the mother of his boy? If so he must have realized to what straits he was subjecting them. Ivory had not forgotten those first few years of grinding poverty, anxiety and suspense. His mother's mind had stood the strain bravely, but it gave way at last; not, however, until that fatal winter journey to New Hampshire, when cold, exposure and fatigue did their worst for her weak body. Religious enthusiast, exalted and impressionable, a natural mystic, she had probably always been, far more so in temperament, indeed, than her husband; but, although she left home on that journey a frail and heartsick woman, she returned a different creature altogether, blurred and confused in mind, with clouded memory and irrational fancies.

She must have given up hope just then, Ivory thought, and her love was so deep that when it was uprooted the soil came with it. Now hope had returned because the cruel memory had faded altogether. She sat by the kitchen window in gentle expectation, watching, always watching.

And this is the way many of Ivory Boynton's evenings were spent, while the heart of him, the five-and-twenty-year-old heart of him, was longing to feel the beat of another heart, a girl's heart only a mile or more away. The ice in Saco water had broken up and the white blocks sailed majestically down toward the sea. Sap was mounting and the elm trees were budding; the trailing arbutus was blossoming in the woods; the robins had come—everything was announcing the spring, yet Ivory saw no changing seasons in his future: nothing but winter, eternal winter there!

## CHAPTER IV.

**P**ATTY had been searching for eggs in the barn chamber and, coming down the ladder from the haymow, spied her father washing the wagon by the wellside near the shed door. Cephas Cole kept store for him at meal hours and whenever trade was unusually brisk, and the Baxter yard was so happily situated that Old Foxy could watch both house and store.

There never was a good time to ask Deacon Baxter a favor, therefore this moment would serve as well as any other; so, approaching him near enough



"Don't answer me back!"

to be heard through the rubbing and splashing, but no nearer than was necessary, Patty said:

"Father, can I go up to Ellen Wilson's this afternoon and stay for tea? I won't start till I've done a good day's work, and I'll come home early."

"What do you want to go gallivantin' to the neighbors for? I never saw anything like the girls nowadays—highly tight, flauntin', traipsin', triflin' trollops, ev'ry one of 'em, that's what they are, and Ellen Wilson's one of the triflin'est. You're old enough now to stay to home where you belong and make an effort to earn your board and clothes, which you can't, even if you try."

Spunk, real Simon pure spunk, started somewhere in Patty and coursed through her blood like wine.

"If a girl's old enough to stay at home and work I should think she was old enough to go out and play once in awhile," Patty was still too timid to make this remark more than a courteous suggestion, so far as its tone was concerned.

"Don't answer me back! You're full of new tricks, and you've got to stop 'em right where you are or there'll be trouble. You were whistlin' just now up in the barn chamber. That's one of the things I won't have around my premises—a whistlin' girl."

"'Twas a Sabbath school hymn that I was whistling!" This with a creditable imitation of defiance.

"That don't make it any better. Sing your hymns 'if you must make a noise while you're workin'."

"You don't have to see," replied the deacon grimly. "All you have to do is to mind when you're spoken to. Now run 'long 'bout your work."

"Can't I go up to Ellen's, then?"

"What's goin' on up there?"

"Just a frolic. There's always a good time at Ellen's, and I would so like the sight of a big, rich house now and then!"

"Just a frolic! Land o' Goshen, hear the girl! 'Sight of a big, rich house, indeed! Will there be any boys at the party?"

"I s'pose so or 'twouldn't be a frolic," said Patty, with awful daring, "but there won't be many—only a few of Mark's friends."

"Well, there ain't goin' to be no more argyfin'! I won't have any girl o' mine frolickin' with boys, so that's the end of it. You're kind o' crazy lately, riggin' yourself out with a ribbon here and a flower there and pullin' your hair down over your ears. Why do you want to cover your ears up? What are they for?"

"To hear you with, father," Patty replied, with honey sweet voice and eyes that blazed.

"Well, I hope they'll never hear anything worse," replied her father, flinging a bucket of water over the last of the wagon wheels.

"They couldn't!" These words were never spoken aloud; but, oh, how Patty longed to shout them with a clarion voice as she walked away in perfect silence, her majestic gait showing, she hoped, how she resented the outcome of the interview.

"I've stood up to father!" she exclaimed triumphantly as she entered the kitchen and set down her yellow bowl of eggs on the table. "I stood up to him and answered him back three times!"

Waitstill was busy with her Saturday morning cooking, but she turned in alarm.

"Patty, what he's you said and done? Tell me quick!"

"I argyfin'd, but it didn't do any good. He won't let me go to Ellen's party."

Waitstill wiped her floury hands and put them on her sister's shoulders.

"Hear what I say, Patty: You must not argue with father, whatever he says. We don't love him and so there isn't the right respect in our hearts, but at least there can be respect in our manners."

"I don't believe I can go on for years holdin' in, Waitstill!" Patty whimpereed.

"Yes, you can. I have!"

"You're different, Waitstill."

"I wasn't so different at sixteen, but that's five years ago, and I've got control of my tongue and my temper since then. Sometime, perhaps, when I have a grievance too great to be rightly borne, sometime when you are away from here in a home of your own, I shall speak out to father; just empty

my heart of all the disappointment and bitterness and rebellion. Somebody ought to tell him the truth and perhaps it will be me!"

Waitstill bent over the girl as she flung herself down beside the table and smoothed her shoulder gently.

"There, there, dear! It isn't like my gay little sister to cry. What is the matter with you today, Patty?"

"I suppose it's the spring," she said, wiping her eyes with her apron and smiling through her tears. "Perhaps I need a dose of sulphur and molasses."

"Don't you feel well as common?"

"Well? I feel too well! I feel as if I was a young colt shut up in an attic. I want to kick up my heels, batter the door down and get out into the pasture. It's no use talking, Waitstill. I can't go on living without a bit of pleasure and I can't go on being patient even for your sake. If it weren't for you I'd run away as Job did, and I never believed Moses slipped on the logs. I'm sure he threw himself into the river, and so should I if I had the courage!"

"Stop, Patty, stop, dear! You will have your bit of pasture at least. I'll do some of your indoor tasks for you, and you shall put on your sunbonnet and go out and dig the dandelion greens for dinner. Take the broken knife and a milk pan, and don't bring in so much earth with them as you did last time. Dry your eyes and look at the green things growing. Remember how young you are and how many years are ahead of you. Go along, dear."

Waitstill went about her work with rather a heavy heart. Was life going to be more rather than less difficult now that Patty was growing up? Would she be able to do her duty both by father and sister and keep peace in the household, as she had vowed in her secret heart always to do? She paused every now and then to look out of the window and wave an encouraging hand to Patty. The girl's bonnet was off, and her uncovered head blazed like red gold in the sunlight. The short young grass was dotted with dandelion blooms, some of them already grown to huge disks of yellow, and Patty moved hither and thither, selecting the younger weeds, deftly putting the broken knife under their roots and popping them into the tin pan. Presently—Deacon Baxter had finished the wagon and gone down the hill to relieve Cephas Cole at the counter—Patty's shrill whistle floated into the kitchen, but with a mischievous glance at the open window she broke off suddenly and began to sing the words of the hymn with rather more emphasis and gusto than strict piety warranted:

There'll be something in heaven for children to do.  
None are idle in that bless-ed land.  
There'll be work for the heart, there'll be work for the mind.  
And employment for each little hand.  
There'll be some-thing to do.  
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Shoes.

Shoes.

## Yeager's Shoe Store

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BELLEFONTE PA.

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The First National Bank

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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

Lyon & Co. 57-34-1y Bellefonte