

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.

Patty has two admirers—Mark Wilson, an educated young man, and Cephas Cole, who is unlearned. Mark kisses her.

Waitstill is spending her life in loving care of Patience. Aunt Abby and Uncle Bart Cole are friends of the whole community.

Cephas Cole, tending store for Baxter, proposes to Patty and is rejected. In his agitation he lets the molasses run all over the store floor.

Although they love each other, Waitstill and Ivory suppress their affection because of their household cares.

Patty and Waitstill go to church, although their father is too mean to give them fitting garments. Waitstill sings in the choir.

A strange young woman in the Wilson pew, a visitor from Boston, makes Patty jealous. Haying time arrives.

Waitstill decides to disobey her father by paying a visit to Mrs. Boynton. Uncle Bart discourages to Cephas on woman's ways.

Mrs. Boynton confides in Waitstill, telling the girl she believes Rodman is not her sister's child, but she cannot be sure.

To punish Waitstill for disobedience Deacon Baxter locks her out all night. She spends the night in the barn. Patience sympathizes.

Patience Baxter is embarrassed amid a multitude of suitors. She thinks Mark is tickle.

Trying to trace his father, Ivory writes to Waitstill a long account of Boynton's following of Cochrane, with which Mrs. Boynton was not in full sympathy.

The village gossips are busy with the names of Waitstill and Ivory, but in a friendly and sympathetic manner.

(Continued from last week.)

"I shouldn't forsake her. Go there when you can, but be more careful about it. You told father that you didn't regret what you had done, and that when he ordered you to do unreasonable things you should disobey him. After all, you are not a black slave. Father will never think of that particular thing again, perhaps, any more than he ever alluded to my driving to Saco with Mrs. Day after you had told him it was necessary for one of us to go there occasionally. He knows that if he is too hard on us Dr. Perry or Uncle Bart would take him in hand. They would have done it long ago if we had ever given any one even a hint of what we have to endure. You will be all right because you only want to do kind, neighborly things. I am the one that will always have to suffer because I can't prove that it's a Christian duty to deceive father and steal off to a dance or a frolic. Yet I might as well be a nun in a convent for all the fun I get. I want a white book muslin dress; I want a pair of thin shoes with buckles; I want a white hat, with a wreath of yellow roses; I want a volume of Byron's poems, and, oh, nobody knows—nobody but the Lord could understand—how I want a string of gold beads!"

"Patty, Patty! To hear you chatter anybody would imagine you thought of nothing but frivolities. I wish you wouldn't do yourself such injustice. Even when nobody hears you but me, it is wrong."

"Sometimes when you think I'm talking nonsense it's really the gospel truth," said Patty. "I'm not a grand, splendid character, Waitstill, and it's no use your deceiving yourself about me. If you do you'll be disappointed."

"Go and parboil the beans and get them into the pot, Patty. Pick up some of the windfalls and make a green apple pie, and I'll be with you in the kitchen myself before long. I never expect to be disappointed in you, Patty—only continually surprised and pleased."

"I thought I'd begin making some soft soap today," said Patty mischievously as she left the room. "We have enough grease saved up. We don't really need it yet, but it makes such a disgusting smell that I'd rather like father to have it with his dinner. It's not much of a punishment for our sleepless night."

CHAPTER XV. A Brace of Lovers.

HAYING was over and the close, sticky dog days, too, and August was slipping into September. There had been plenty of rain all the season, and the countryside was looking as fresh and green as an emerald. The hillsides were already clothed with a verdant growth of new grass and—

The red pennons of the cardinal flowers hung motionless upon their upright staves. How they gleamed in the meadow grasses and along the brook-sides, like brilliant flecks of flame, giving a new beauty to the nosegays that Waitstill

carried or sent to Mrs. Boynton every week.

To the eye of the casual observer life in the two little villages by the river's brink went on as peacefully as ever, but there were subtle changes taking place nevertheless. Cephas Cole had "asked" the second time and again had been refused by Patty, so that even a very idiot for hopefulness could not urge his father to put another story on the ell.

"If it turns out to be Phoebe Day," thought Cephas dolefully, "two rooms is plenty good enough, an' I shan't block up the door that leads from the main part, neither, as I thought likely I should. If so be it's got to be Phoebe, not Patty, I shan't care whether mother troops out 'n' in or not." And Cephas dealt out rice and tea and coffee with so languid an air and made such frequent mistakes in weighing the sugar that he drew upon himself many a sharp rebuke from the deacon.

"Of course I'd club him over the head with a salt fish twice a day under ordinary circumstances," Cephas confided to his father, with a vaillant air that he never wore in Deacon Baxter's presence, "but I've got a reason, known to nobody but myself, for wantin' to stan' well with the old man for a spell longer. If ever I quit wantin' to stan' well with him he'll get his comeuppance short and sudden!"

"Speakin' o' standin' well with folks, Phil Perry's kind o' makin' up to Patience Baxter, ain't he, Cephas?" asked Uncle Bart gunnledly. "Mebbe you wouldn't notice it, hev'in' no particular interest, but your mother's kind o' got the idee into her head lately, an' she's turrible farsighted."

"I guess it's so!" Cephas responded gloomily. "It's nup an' tuck 'tween him an' Mark Wilson. That girl draws 'em as molasses does flies. She does it 'thout liftin' a finger, too, no more'n the molasses does. She just sets still an' is! An' all the time she's nothin' but a flighty little redheaded spiffire that don't know a good husband when she sees one. The feller that gits her will live to regret it, that's my opinion!" And Cephas thought to himself, "Good Lord, don't I wish I was regrettin' it this very minute!"

"I s'pose a girl like Phoebe Day'd be consid'able less trouble to live with?" ventured Uncle B.

"I never could take any fancy to that low hair o' hers! I like the color well enough when I'm peeling it off a corn cob, but I don't like it on a girl's head," objected Cephas hypercritically. "An' her eyes hain't got enough blue in 'em to be blue. They're jest like skimmilk. An' she keeps her mouth open a little mite all the time, jest as if there wa'n't no good draft through. An' she was a tryin' to git air. An' 'twas me that begun callin' her 'Foeble Phoebe' in school, an' the scholars'll never forgit it. They'd throw it up to me the whole 'durin' time if I should go to work an' keep company wita her!"

"Mebbe they've forgot by this time," Uncle Bart responded joyfully; "though it's an awful risk when you think o' Companion Pike! Samuel, he was baptized and Samuel he continued to be, till he married the Widder Bixby from Waterboro. Bein' as how there wa'n't nothin' partic'ly attractive 'bout him—though he was as nice a feller as ever lived—somebody asked her why she married him, an' she said her cat hed jest died an' she wanted a companion. The boys never let go o' that story! Samuel Pike he ceased to be thirty year ago, an' Companion Pike he's remained up to this instant minute!"

"He ain't lived up to his name much," remarked Cephas. "He's to home for his meals, but I guess his wife never sees him between times."

"If the cat hed lived mebbe she'd 'a' been better comp'ny, on the whole," chuckled Uncle Bart. "Companion was allers kind o' dreamy an' absent minded from a boy. I remember askin' him what his wife's Christian name was (she bein' a stranger to Riverboro), an' he said he didn't know! Said he called her Mis' Bixby afore he married her an' Mis' Pike afterwards!"

"Well, there's something turrible queer 'bout this marryin' business," and Cephas drew a sigh from the heels of his boots. "It seems 's if a man hedn't no natcher drawin' towards a girl with a good farm 'n' stock that was willin' to have him! Seems jest as if it set him ag'in' her somehow! And yet if you've got to sing out of the same book with a girl your whole lifetime, it does seem 's if you'd ought to have a kind of a fancy for her at the start, anyhow!"

"You may feel dif'rent as time goes on, Cephas, an' come to see Feeble—I would say Phoebe—as your mother does. The best fire don't flare up the soonest, you know." But old Uncle Bart saw that his son's heart was heavy and forebore to press the subject.

Annabel Franklin had returned to Boston after a month's visit and to her surprise had returned as disengaged as she came. Mark Wilson, thoroughly bored by her vacuities of mind, longed now for more intercourse with Patty Baxter, Patty, so gay and unexpected; so lively to talk with, so pliquing to the fancy, so skittish and difficult to manage, so temptingly pretty, with a beauty all her own, and never two days alike.

There were many lions in the way, and these only added to the zest of pursuit. With all the other girls of the village opportunities multiplied, but he could scarcely get ten minutes alone with Patty. The deacon's orders were absolute in regard to young men. His daughters were never to drive or walk alone with them, never to go to dances or "trouts" of any sort and never receive them at the house, this last mandate being quite unnecessary, as no youth in his right mind would have gone a-courtin' under the deacon's forbidding gaze. And still there were

sudden, delicious chances to be seized now and then if one had his eyes open and his wits about him. There was the walk to or from the singing school, when a sentimental couple could drop a few feet at least behind the rest and exchange a word or two in comparative privacy; there were the church "circles" and prayer meetings and the intervals between Sunday services, when Mark could detach Patty a moment from the group on the meeting house steps. More valuable than all these, a complete schedule of Patty's various movements here and there, together with a profound study of Deacon Baxter's habits, which were or-



"He ain't livin' up to his name much," remarked Cephas.

dinarly as punctual as they were disagreeable, permitted Mark many stolen interviews, as sweet as they were brief. There was never a second kiss, however, in these casual meetings and partings. The first, in springtime, had found Patty a child, surprised, unprepared. She was a woman now, for it does not take years to achieve that miracle; months will do it or days or even hours. Her summer's experience with Cephas Cole had wonderfully broadened her powers, giving her an assurance sadly lacking before, as well as a knowledge of detail, a certain finished skill in the management of a lover, which she could ably use on any one who happened to come along. And at the moment any one who happened to come along served the purpose ad-

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The first change of life, the time when the girl becomes, in Nature's purpose a woman, is a critical period in every girl's history. Mothers should use every vigilance not to permit the establishment of conditions which will involve a tremendous penalty in later years. Nothing could be wiser than to suggest the use of Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription at such a time. It establishes regularity, quiets the nerves, and gives a healthy balance to the whole body. "Favorite Prescription" contains no opium, cocaine or other narcotic, and is entirely free from alcohol.

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