

The Story of Waitstill Baxter

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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 Cochran, 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. Having time arrives.

Waitstill decides to disobey her father by paying a visit to Mrs. Boynton. Uncle Bart discourses 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 better.

Trying to trace his father, Ivory writes to Waitstill a long account of Boynton's following of Cochran, 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.

In Ivory's absence young Rodman ministers to Mrs. Boynton. She is ill and sends Rodman for Ivory.

Ivory receives proof of his father's death and succeeds in convincing his mother of it. Waitstill volunteers her help in the Boynton housekeeping.

Despairing of winning Patty, Cephas turns his affections elsewhere. Patty and Mark are now sweethearts.

Patty and Mark know Deacon Baxter will not consent to their marriage, so they plan an elopement to New Hampshire.

[Continued from last week.]

CHAPTER XIX. Lois Buries Her Dead.

THE replies that Ivory had received from his letters of inquiry concerning his father's movements since leaving Maine and his possible death in the west left no reasonable room for doubt. Traces of Aaron Boynton in New Hampshire, in Massachusetts, in New York and finally in Ohio all pointed in one direction, and, although there were gaps and discrepancies in the account of his doings, the fact of his death seemed to be established by two apparently reliable witnesses.

That he was not unaccompanied in his earliest migrations seemed clear, but the woman mentioned as his wife disappeared suddenly from the reports, and the story of his last days was the story of a broken down, melancholy, unlearned man, dependent for the list offices on strangers. He left no messages and no papers, said Ivory's correspondent and never made mention of any family connections whatsoever. He had no property and no means of defraying the expenses of his illness after he was stricken with the fever. No letters were found among his poor effects and no article that could prove his identity, unless it were a small gold locket, which bore no initials or marks of any kind, but which contained two locks of fair and brown hair, intertwined. The tiny trinket was enclosed in the letter, as of no value, unless some one recognized it as a keepsake.

Ivory read the correspondence with a heavy heart, inasmuch as it corroborated all his worst fears. He had sometimes secretly hoped that his father might return and explain the reason of his silence or in lieu of that that there might come to light the story of a pilgrimage, fanciful perhaps, but innocent of evil intention, one that could be related to his wife and his former friends and then buried forever with the death that had ended it.

Neither of these hopes could now ever be realized nor his father's memory made other than a cause for endless regret, sorrow and shame. His father, who had begun life so handsomely, with rare gifts of mind and personality, a wife of unusual beauty and intelligence and, while still young in years, a considerable success in his chosen profession. His poor father! What could have been the reasons for so complete a downfall?

Ivory asked Dr. Perry's advice about showing one or two of the briefer let-

ters and the locket to his mother. After her fainting fit and the exhaustion that followed it, Ivory begged her to see the old doctor, but without avail. Finally, after days of pleading, he took her hands in his and said: "I do everything a mortal man can do to be a good son to you, mother. Won't you do this to please me and trust that I know what is best?" Whereupon she gave a trembling assent, as if she were agreeing to something indescribably painful, and, indeed, this sight of a former friend seemed to frighten her strangely.

After Dr. Perry had talked with her for a half hour and examined her sufficiently to make at least a reasonable guess as to her mental and physical condition, he advised Ivory to break the news of her husband's death to her.

"If you can get her to comprehend it," he said, "it is bound to be a relief from this terrible suspense."

"Will there be any danger of making her worse? Mightn't the shock cause too violent emotion?" asked Ivory anxiously.

"I don't think she is any longer capable of violent emotion," the doctor answered. "Her mind is certainly clearer than it was three years ago, but her body is nearly burned away by the mental conflict. There is scarcely any part of her but is weary—worn out to death, poor soul! One cannot look at her patient, lovely face without longing to lift some part of her burden. Make a trial, Ivory. It's a justifiable experiment, and I think it will succeed. I must not come any oftener myself than is absolutely necessary. She seemed afraid of me."

The experiment did succeed. Lois Boynton listened breathlessly with parted lips and with apparent comprehension to the story Ivory told her. Over and over again he told her gen-



Her Face Showed That She Was Deeply Moved.

tly the story of her husband's death, trying to make it sink into her mind clearly, so that there should be no consequent bewilderment. She was calm and silent, though her face showed that she was deeply moved. She broke down only when Ivory showed her the locket.

"I gave it to my husband when you were born, my son!" she sobbed. "After all, it seems no surprise to me that your father is dead. He said he would come back when the mayflowers bloomed, and when I saw the autumn leaves I knew that six months must have gone and he would never stay away from us for six months without writing. That is the reason I have seldom watched for him these last weeks. I must have known that it was no use."

She rose from her rocking chair and moved feebly toward her bedroom. "Can you spare me the rest of the day, Ivory?" she faltered as she leaned on her son and made her slow progress from the kitchen. "I must bury the body of my grief and I want to be alone at first. If only I could see Waitstill! We have both thought this was coming; she has a woman's instinct; she is younger and stronger than I am and she said it was braver not to watch and pine and fret as I have done, but to have faith in God that he would send me a sign when he was ready. She said if I could manage to be braver you would be happier too." Here she sank on to her bed exhausted, but still kept up her murmuring faintly and feebly between long intervals of silence.

"Do you think Waitstill could come tomorrow?" she asked. "I am so much braver when she is here with me. After supper I will put away your father's cup and plate once and for all, Ivory, and your eyes need never fill with tears again as they have sometimes when you have seen me watching. You needn't worry about me; I am remembering better these days, and the bells that ring in my ears are not so loud. If only the pain in my side were less and I were not so pressed for breath, I should be quite strong and could see everything clearly at last. There is something else that remains to be remembered. I have almost caught it once and it must come to me again before long. Put the locket under my pillow, Ivory; close the door, please, and leave me to myself. I can't make it quite clear, my feeling about it, but it seems just as if I were going to bury your father, and I want to be alone."

New England's annual pageant of

autumn was being unfolded day by day in all its accustomed splendor, and the feast and riot of color, the almost unimaginable glory, was the common property of the whole countryside, rich and poor, to be shared alike if perchance all eyes were equally alive to the wonder and the beauty.

Waitstill Baxter went as often as she could to the Boynton farm, though never when Ivory was at home, and the affection between the younger and the older woman grew closer and closer, so that it almost broke Waitstill's heart to leave the fragile creature when her presence seemed to bring such complete peace and joy.

"No one ever clung to me so before," she often thought as she was hurrying across the fields after one of her half hour visits. "But the end must come before long. Ivory does not realize it yet, nor Rodman, but it seems as if she could never survive the long winter."

Thanksgiving day is drawing nearer and nearer, and how little I am able to do for a single creature to prove to God that I am grateful for my existence! I could, if only I were free, make such a merry day for Patty and Mark and their young friends. Oh, what joy if father were a man who would let me set a bountiful table in our great kitchen; would sit at the head and say grace and we could bow our heads over the cloth, a united family, or if I had done my duty in my home and could go to that other, where I am so needed—go with my father's blessing! All the woman in me is wasting, wasting. Oh, my dear, dear man, how I long for him! Oh, my own dear man, my helpmate, shall I ever live by his side? I love him, I want him, I need him! And my dear little unmothered, unfathered boy, how happy I could make him! How I should love to cook and sew for them all and wrap them in comfort! How I should love to smooth my dear mother's last days, for she is my mother in spirit, in affection, in desire and in being Ivory's!"

Waitstill's longing, her discouragement, her helplessness, overcame her wholly, and she flung herself down under a tree in the pasture in a very passion of sobbing, a luxury in which she could seldom afford to indulge herself. The luxury was short lived, for in five minutes she heard Rodman's voice, and heard him running to meet her as he often did when she came to their house or went away from it, dogging her footsteps or Patty's whenever or wherever he could waylay them.

"Why, my dear, dear Waity, did you tumble and hurt yourself?" the boy cried.

"Yes, dreadfully, but I'm better now, so walk along with me and tell me the news, Rod."

"There isn't much news. Ivory told you I'd left school and am studying at home? He helps me evenings and I'm 'way ahead of the class.'"

[Continued on page 7, Col. 1]

References.

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