

The Story of Waitstill Baxter

(Continued from page 6, Col. 3)

"No, Ivory didn't tell me. I haven't seen him lately." "I said if the big brother kept school, the little brother ought to keep house," laughed the boy. "He says I can hire out as a cook pretty soon! Aunt Boynton's 'most always up to get dinner and supper, but I can make lots of things now—things that Aunt Boynton can eat too."

"Oh, I cannot bear to have you and Ivory cooking for yourselves!" exclaimed Waitstill, the tears starting again from her eyes. "I must come over the next time when you are at home, Rod, and I can help you make something nice for supper."

"We get along pretty well," said Rodman contentedly. "I love book learning like Ivory, and I'm going to be a schoolmaster or a preacher when Ivory's a lawyer. Do you think Patty'd like a schoolmaster or a preacher best, and do you think I'd be too young to marry her by and by, if she would wait for me?"

"I didn't think you had any idea of marrying Patty," laughed Waitstill through her tears. "Is this something new?"

"It's not exactly new," said Rod, jumping along like a squirrel in the path. "Nobody could look at Patty and not think about marrying her. I'd love to marry you, too, but you're too big and grand for a boy. Of course I'm not going to ask Patty yet. Ivory said once you should never ask a girl until you can keep her like a queen. Then after a minute he said: 'Well, maybe not quite like a queen. Rod, for that would mean longer than a man could wait. Shall we say until he could keep her like the dearest lady in the land?' That's the way he said it. You do cry dreadfully easy today, Waity. I'm sure you barked your leg or skinned your knee when you fell down. Don't you think the 'dearest lady in the land' is a nice sounding sentence?"

"I do, indeed!" cried Waitstill to herself as she turned the words over and over trying to feed her hungry heart with them. "I love to hear Ivory talk. It's like the stories in the books. We have our best times in the barn, for I'm helping with the milking now. Our yellow cow's name is Molly and the red cow used to be Dolly, but we changed her to Golly 'cause she's so troublesome."

"We had a cross old cow like that once," said Waitstill absently, loving to hear the boy's chatter and the eternal quotations from his beloved hero. "We have great fun cooking, too," continued Rod. "When Aunt Boynton was first sick she stayed in bed more, and Ivory and I hadn't got used to things. One morning we bound up each other's burns. Ivory had three fingers and I two done up in buttery rags to take the fire out. Ivory called us 'soldiers dressing their wounds after the battle.' Sausages spatter dreadfully, don't they? And when you turn a pancake it flops on top of the stove. Can you flop one straight, Waity?"

"Yes, I can; straight as a die; that's what girls are made for. Now run along home to your big brother, and do put on some warmer clothes under your coat. The weather's getting colder."

"Aunt Boynton hasn't patched our thick ones yet, but she will soon, and, if she doesn't, Ivory'll take this Saturday evening and do them himself. He said so."

"He shall not!" cried Waitstill passionately. "It is not seemly for Ivory to sew and mend, and I will not allow it. You shall bring me those things that need patching without telling any one, do you hear, and I will meet you on the edge of the pasture Saturday afternoon and give them back to you. You are not to speak of it to any one, you understand, or perhaps I shall pound you to a jelly! You'd make a sweet rose jelly to eat with turkey for Thanksgiving dinner, you dear, comforting little boy!"

Rodman ran toward home, and Waitstill hurried along, scarcely noticing the beauties of the woods and fields and waysides, all glowing masses of goldenrod and purple frost flowers. Patty was standing under a little rock maple, her brown linsey-woolsey in tone with the landscape and the hood of her brown cape pulled over her bright head. She looked flushed and excited as she ran up to her sister and said: "Waity, darling, you've been crying! Has father been scolding you?"

"No, dear, but my heart is aching today so that I can scarcely bear it. A wave of discouragement came over me as I was walking through the woods, and I gave up to it a bit. I remembered how soon it will be Thanksgiving day, and I'd so like to make it happier for you and a few others that I love."

Patty could have given a shrewd guess as to the chief cause of the heartache, but she forebore to ask any questions. "Cheer up, Waity!" she cried. "You can never tell. We may have a thankful Thanksgiving, after all."

CHAPTER XX.

Phoebe Triumphs.

MRS. ABEL DAY had come to spend the afternoon with Aunt Abby Cole, and they were seated at the two sitting room windows, sweeping the landscape with eagle eyes in the intervals of making patchwork.

"The foliage has been a little mite too rich this season," remarked Aunt Abby. "I b'lieve I'm glad to see it thinnin' out some, so t' we can have some kind of an idee of what's goin' on in the village."

"There's plenty goin' on," Mrs. Day answered unctuously. "some of it above board an' some underneath it."

"An' that's jest where it's aggravatin' to have the leaves so thick and the trees so high between you and other folks' houses. Trees are good for shade, it's true, but there's a limit to all things. There was a time when I could see 'bout everything that went on up to Baxters' and down to Bart's shop and, by goin' up attic, consid'able many things that happened on the bridge. Bart vows he never planted that plum tree at the back door of his shop—says the children must have hove out plum stones when they was settin' on the steps and the tree come up of its own accord."

"Men are an awful trial," admitted Mrs. Day. "Abel never sympathizes with my headaches. I told him a-Sunday I didn't believe he'd mind if I died the next day, an' all he said was, 'Why don't you try it an' see, Lyddy?' He thinks that's humorous."

"I know. That's the way Bartholomew talks. I guess they all do. You can see the bridge better'n I can, Lyddy. Has Mark Wilson drove over sense you've been settin' there? He's like one o' them ostriches that hides their heads in the sand when the bird catchers are comin' along, thinkin' 'cause they can't see anything they'll never be seen. He knows folks would never tell tales to Deacon Baxter, whatever the girls done. They hate him too bad. Lawyer Wilson lives so far away he can't keep any watch o' Mark, an' Mis' Wilson's so cityed an' purse proud nobody ever goes to her with any news, bad or good; so them that's the most concerned is as blind as bats. Mark's consid'able stid-



"Patty'll be Mrs. Wilson or nothin'," was Mrs. Day's response.

dier'n he used to be, but you needn't tell me he has any notion of bringin' one o' that Baxter tribe into his family. He's only amusin' himself."

"Patty'll be Mrs. Wilson or nothin'," was Mrs. Day's response. "Both o' them girls is silk purses, an' you can't make sows' ears of 'em. We ain't neither of us hardly fair to Patty, an' I s'pose it's because she didn't set any proper value on Cephas."

"Oh, she's good enough for Mark. I guess, though I ain't so sure of his intentions as you be. She's nobody's fool, Patty ain't; I allow that, though she'd treat Cephas like the dirt in the road. I'm thankful he's come to his senses an' found out the difference between dross an' gold."

"It's very good of you to put it that way, Abby," Mrs. Day responded gratefully, for it was Phoebe, her own offspring, who was alluded to as the most precious metals. "I suppose we'd better have the publishing notice put up in the frame before Sunday? There'll be a great crowd out that day, and at Thanksgiving service the next Thursday too."

"Cephas says he don't care how soon folks hears the news, now all's settled," said his mother. "I guess he's kind of anxious that the village should know jest how little truth there is in the gossip 'bout him bein' all upset over Patience Baxter. He said they took consid'able notice of him an' Phoebe settin' together at the harvest festival last evenin'. He thought the Baxter girls would be there for certain, but I s'pose Old Foxy wouldn't let 'em go up to the Mills in the evenin' nor spend a quarter on their tickets."

"Mark could have invited Patty an' paid for her ticket, I should think, or passed her in free, for that matter, when the Wilsons got up the entertainment; but, of course, the deacon never allows his girls to go anywhere with men folks."

"Not in public; so they meet 'em side 't the river or round the corner of Bart's shop, or anywhere they can, when the deacon's back's turned. If you tied a handkerchief over Waitstill's eyes she could find her way blindfold to Ivory Boynton's house, but she's good as gold, Waitstill is. She'll stay where her duty calls her every time. If any misfortune or scandal should come near them two girls the deacon will have nobody but himself to thank for it, that's one sure thing."

"Young folks can't be young but once," sighed Mrs. Day. "How'd you like that Boston singer that the Wilsons brought here, Abby? Wait a min-

ute, is Cephas, or the deacon tendin' store this afternoon?"

"The deacon; Cephas is paintin' up to the Mills."

"Well, Mark Wilson's horse an' buggy is meanderin' slowly down Aunt Betty Jack's hill, an' Mark is studyin' the road as if he was lookin' for a four leafed clover."

"He'll hitch at the tavern, or the Edgewood store, an' wait his chance to get a word with Patience," said Aunt Abby. "He knows when she takes milk to the Morrills, or butter to the parsonage; also when she eats an' drinks an' winks her eye an' ketches her breath an' lifts her foot. Now he's disappeared an' we'll wait. . . . Why, as to that Boston singer, I don't know how high she went, but I guess there wa'n't no higher to go!"

"It made me kind o' nervous," allowed Mrs. Day. "Folks said she sung runs and trills better'n any woman up to Boston."

(Continued next week.)

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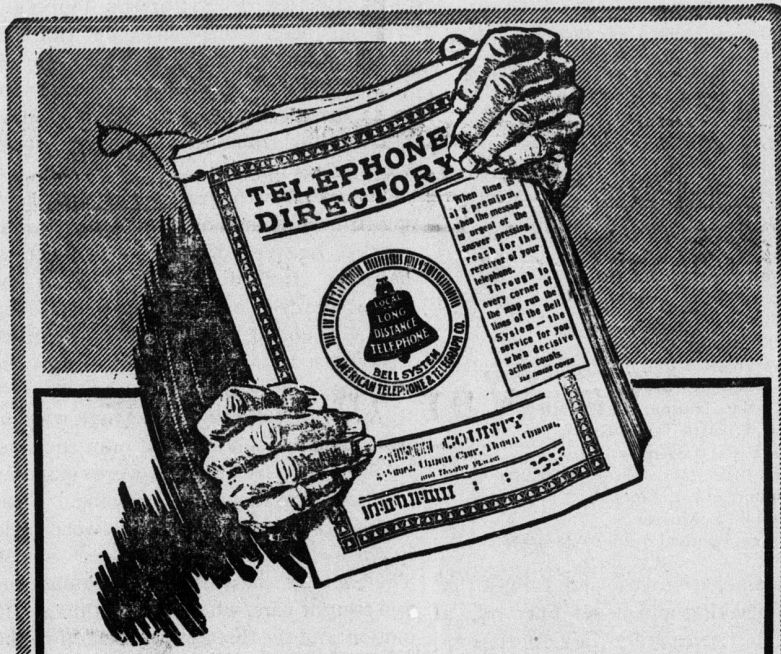
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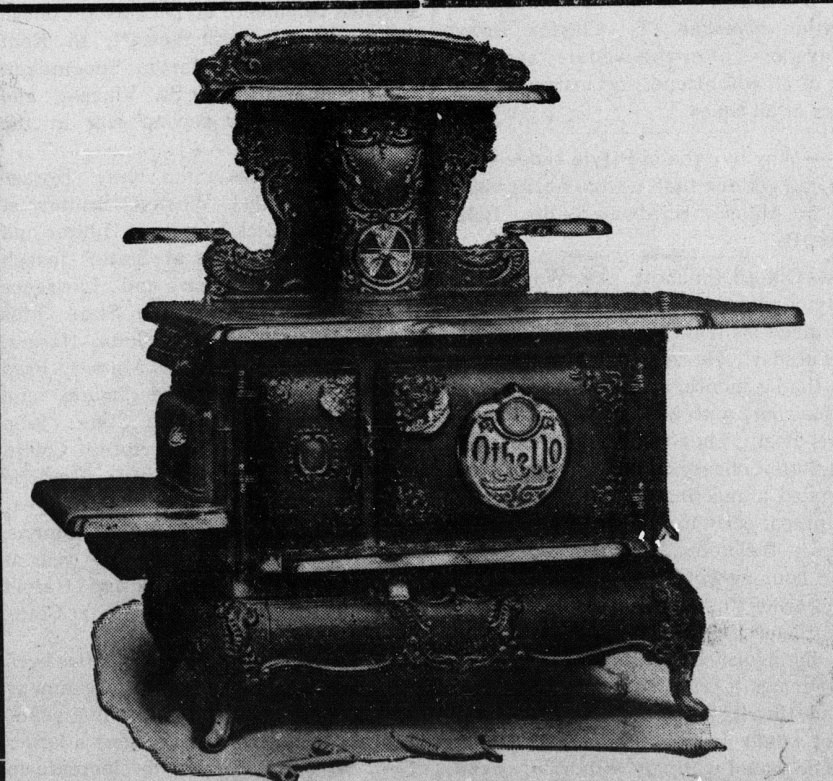


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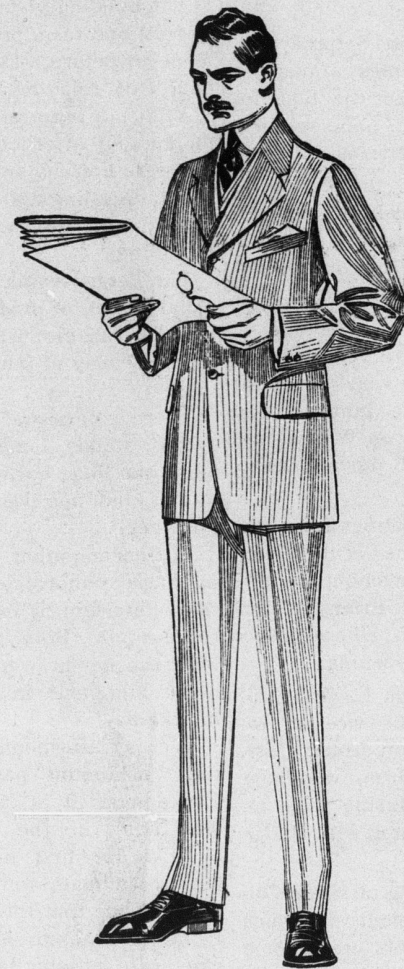
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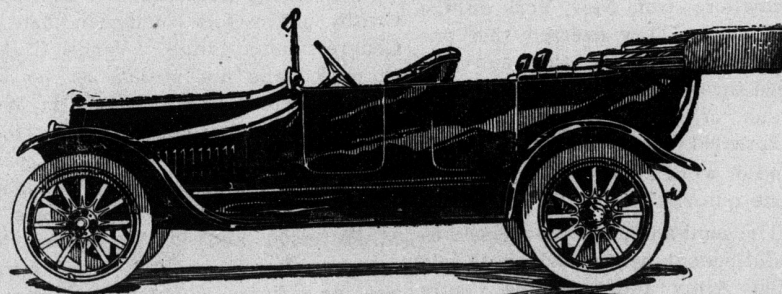
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