

The Story of Waitstill Baxter

By KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

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SYNOPSIS

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

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. Pattence 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 Pattence, 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. Pattence sympathizes.

Pattence Baxter is embarrassed amid a multitude of suitors. She thinks Mark is sick.

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.

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.

Deacon Baxter is more than usually "difficult." Patty runs off with Mark, is married and returns and tells Waitstill.

The deacon turns Patty out into the cold. She finds shelter with Aunt Abby and Uncle Bart.

Waitstill rises against her father and tells him she will marry Ivory as soon as he is ready to have her.

[Continued from last week.]

"I've a good mind to go upstairs and put on my gold beads and my wedding ring just to get used to them and to feel a little more married. No, I can't after all, for there is father driving up the hill now, and he may come into the house. What brings him home at this hour?"

"I was expecting him every moment," and Waitstill rose and stirred the fire. "He took the pump and went to the mills for grain."

"He hasn't anything in the back of the pump—and, oh, Watty, he is standing up now and whipping the horse with all his might. I never saw him drive like that before! What can be the matter? He can't have seen my wedding ring, and only three people in all the world know about my being married."

Waitstill turned from the window, her heart beating a little faster.

"What three people know three hundred are likely to know sooner or later. It may be a false alarm, but father is in a fury about something. He must not be told the news until he is in a better humor!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

Patty Is Shown the Door.

DEACON BAXTER drove into the barn and, flinging a blanket over the wheezing horse, closed the door behind him and hurried into the house without even thinking to lay down his whip.

Opening the kitchen door and stopping outside long enough to kick the snow from his heavy boots, he strode into the kitchen and confronted the two girls. He looked at them sharply before he spoke, scanning their flushed faces and tear stained eyes; then he broke out savagely:

"Oh, you're both here; that's lucky. Now stan' up and answer to me. What's this I hear at the Mills about Pattence—common talk outside the store?"

The time had come, then, and by some strange fatality when Mark was too far away to be of service.

"Tell me what you heard, father, and I can give you a better answer," Patty replied, hedging to gain time and shaking inwardly.

"Bill Morrill says his brother that

works in New Hampshire reports you as ridin' through the streets of Allentown last Monday with a young man."

There seemed but one reply to this, so Patty answered tremblingly: "He says what's true. I was there."

"What!" And it was plain from the deacon's voice that he had really disbelieved the rumor. A whirlwind of rage swept through him and shook him from head to foot.

"Do you mean to stan' there an' own up to me that you was thirty miles away from home with a young man?" he shouted.

"If you ask me a plain question I've got to tell you the truth, father. I was."

"How dare you carry on like that and drag my name into scandal, you worthless trollop, you? Who went along with you? I'll skin the hide off him, whoever 't was!"

Patty remained mute at this threat, but Waitstill caught her hand and whispered: "Tell him all, dear. It's got to come out. Be brave, and I'll stand by you."

"Why are you interferin' and puttin' in your meddlesome oar?" the deacon said, turning to Waitstill. "The girl would never 'a' been there if you'd attended to your business. She's nothin' but a fool of a young filly, an' you're an old cart horse. It was your job to look out for her, as your mother told you to. Anybody might 'a' guessed she needed watchin'!"

"You shall not call my sister an old cart horse! I'll not permit it!" cried Patty, plucking up courage in her sister's defense and, as usual, comporting herself a trifle more like a spitfire than a true heroine of tragedy.

"Hush, Patty! Let him call me anything that he likes. It makes no difference at such a time."

"Waitstill knew nothing of my going away till this afternoon," continued Patty. "I kept it secret from her on purpose, because I was afraid she would not approve. I went with Mark Wilson, and—and I married him in New Hampshire because we couldn't do it at home without everybody's knowledge. Now you know all!"

"Do you mean to tell me you've gone an' married that reckless, wuthless, horse trottin', card playin' sneak of a Wilson boy, that's courted every girl in town? Married the son of a man that has quarreled with me and insulted me in public? By the Lord Harry, I'll crack this whip over your shoulders once before I'm done with you! If I'd used it years ago you might have been an honest woman today instead of a—"

Foxwell Baxter had wholly lost control of himself, and the temper, that

head when she heard your step. Whatever crop you sow is bound to come up, father; that's nature's law and God's as well."

"You hold your tongue, you, readin' the law to your elders an' betters," said the old man, choking with wrath.

"My business is with this wuthless sister o' yours, not with you! You've got your coat and hood on, miss, so you jest clear out o' the house, an' if you're too slow about it I'll help you along. I've no kind of an idea you're rightly married, for that young Wilson sneak wouldn't pay so high for you as all that. But if it amuses you to call him your husband go an' find him an' stay with him. This is an honest house an' no place for such as you!"

Patty had a good share of the Baxter temper, not under such control as Waitstill's, and the blood mounted into her face.

"You shall not speak to me so!" she said intrepidly, while keeping a discreet eye on the whip. "I'm not a caterpillar to be stepped on. I'm a married woman, as right as a New Hampshire justice can make me, with a wedding ring and a certificate to show if need be. And you shall not call my husband names. Time will tell what he is going to be, and that's

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