

The Story of Waitstill Baxter

(Continued from page 6, Col. 4)

in and put it on her bed to keep her company while I came to watch for you. Aunt Boynton let Mrs. Mason braid her hair and seemed to like her brushing it. It's been dreadful lonesome, and, oh, I am glad you came back, Ivory. Did you find any more spruce gum where you went this time?"

"Pounds and pounds, Rod; enough to bring me in nearly \$100. I chanced on the greatest place I've found yet. I followed the wake of an old whirlwind that had left long furrows in the forest—I've told you how the thing works—and I tracked its course by the gum that had formed wherever the trees were wounded. It's hard, lonely work, Rod, but it pays well."

"If I could have been there maybe we could have got more. I'm good at climbing up trees."

"Yes, sometime we'll go gum picking together. We'll climb the trees like a couple of cats and take our knives and scrape off the precious lumps that are worth so much money to the druggists. You've let down the bars, I see."

"Cause I knew you'd come tonight," said Rodman. "I felt it in my bones. We're going to have a splendid supper."

"Are we? That's good news." Ivory tried to make his tone bright and interested, though his heart was like a lump of lead in his breast. "It's the least I can do for the poor little chap," he thought, "when he stays as caretaker in this lonely spot. I wonder if I hadn't better drive into the barn, Rod, and leave the harness on Nick till I go in and see mother? Guess I will."

"She's hot, Aunt Boynton, hot and restless, but Mrs. Mason thinks that's all."

Ivory found his mother feverish, and her eyes were unnaturally bright, but she was clear in mind and cheerful, too, sitting up in bed to breathe the better, while the Maltese cat snuggled under her arm and purred peacefully.

"The cat is Rod's idea," she said smilingly, but in a very weak voice. "He is a great nurse. I should never have thought of the cat myself, but she gives me more comfort than all the medicine."

Ivory and Rodman drew up to the supper table, already set in the kitchen, but before Ivory took his seat he softly closed the door that led into the living room. They ate their beans and brown bread and the mince pie that had been the "splendid" feature of the meal, as reported by the boy, and when they had finished and Rodman was clearing the table Ivory walked to the window, lighting his pipe the while, and stood soberly looking out on the snowy landscape. One could scarcely tell it was twilight, with such sweeps of whiteness to catch every gleam of the dying day.

"Drop work a minute and come here, Rod," he said at length. "Can you keep a secret?"

"Course I can! I'm chock full of 'em now, and nobody could dig one of 'em out of me with a pickaxe!"

"Oh, well, if you're full you naturally couldn't hold another!"

"I could try to squeeze it in if it's a nice one," coaxed the boy.

"I don't know whether you'll think it's a nice one. Rod, for it breaks up one of your plans. I'm not sure myself how nice it is, but it's a very big, unexpected, startling one. What do you think—your favorite, Patty, has gone and got married!"

"Patty! Married!" cried Rod, then hastily putting his hand over his mouth to hush his too loud speaking.

"Yes. She and Mark Wilson ran away last Monday, drove over to Allentown, N. H., and were married without telling a soul. Deacon Baxter discovered everything this afternoon, like the old fox that he is, and turned Patty out of the house."

"Mean old skinflint!" exclaimed Rod excitedly, all the incipient manhood rising in his ten-year-old breast. "Is she gone to live with the Wilsons?"

"The Wilsons don't know yet that Mark is married to her, but I met him driving like Jehu, just after I had left Patty, and told him everything that had happened and did my best to cool him down and keep him from murdering his new father-in-law by showing him it would serve no real purpose now."

"Did he look married and all different?" asked Rod curiously.

"Yes, he did, and more like a man than ever he looked before in his life. We talked everything over together, and he went home at once to break the news to his family without even going to take a peep at Patty. I couldn't hear to have them meet till he had something cheerful to say to the poor little soul. When I met her by Uncle Bart's shop she was trudging along in the snow like a dragged butterfly and crying like a baby."

"Sympathetic tears dimmed Rodman's eyes. "I can't bear to see girls cry, Ivory. I just can't bear it, especially Patty."

"Neither can I, Rod. I came pretty near wiping her eyes, but pulled up, remembering she wasn't a child, but a married lady. Well, now we come to the point."

"Isn't Patty's being married the point?"

"No, only part of it. Patty's being sent away from home leaves Waitstill alone with the deacon, do you see? And if Patty is your favorite, Waitstill is mine. I might as well own up to that."

"She's mine, too," cried Rod. "They are both my favorites, but I always thought Patty was the suitablest for me to marry if she'd wait for me. Waitstill is too grand for a boy!"

"She's too grand for anybody, Rod. There isn't a man alive that's worthy to strap on her skates."

"Well, she's too grand for anybody except"—and here Rod's shy, wistful voice trailed off into discreet silence.

"Now, I had some talk with Patty, and she thinks Waitstill will have no trouble with her father just at present. She says he lavished so much rage upon her that there'll be none left for anybody else for a day or two. And, moreover, that he will never dare to go too far with Waitstill because she's so useful to him. I'm not afraid of his beating or injuring her so long as he keeps his sober senses, if he's ever rightly had any. But I don't like to think of his upbraiding her and breaking her heart with his cruel talk just after she's lost the sister that's been her only companion." And Ivory's hand trembled as he filled his pipe. He had no confidant but this quaint, tender-hearted, old-fashioned little lad, to whom he had grown to speak his mind as if he were a man of his own age.

And Rod, in the same way, had gradually learned to understand and sympathize.

"It's dreadful lonesome on Town House hill," said the boy in a hushed tone.

"Dreadful lonesome," echoed Ivory with a sigh; "and I don't dare leave mother until her fever dies down a bit and she sleeps. Now, do you remember the night that she was taken ill, and we shared the watch?"

Rodman held his breath. "Do you mean you're going to let me help just as if I was big?" he asked, speaking through a great lump in his throat.

"There are only two of us, Rod. You're rather young for this piece of work, but you're trusty—you're trusty!"

"Am I to keep watch on the deacon?"

"That's it, and this is my plan: Nick will have had his feed. You're to drive to the bridge when it gets a little darker and hitch in Uncle Bart's horse shed, covering Nick well. You're to go into the brick store, and while you're getting some groceries wrapped up, listen to anything the men say, to see if they know what's happened. When you've hung about as long as you dare leave your bundle and say you'll call in again for it. Then see if Baxter's store is open. I don't believe it will be, and if it isn't look for a light in his kitchen window and prowl about till you know that Waitstill and the deacon have gone up to their bedrooms. Then go to Uncle Bart's and find out if Patty is there."

Rod's eyes grew bigger and bigger. "Shall I talk to her?" he asked, "and what'll I say?"

"No, just ask if she's there. If she's gone Mark has made it right with his family and taken her home. If she hasn't, God knows how that matter will be straightened out. Anyhow, she has a husband now, and she seems to value her, and Waitstill is alone on the top of that wind swept hill!"

"I'll go. I'll remember everything," cried Rodman, in the seventh heaven of delight at the responsibilities Ivory was heaping upon him.

"Don't stay beyond 8 o'clock, but come back and tell me everything you've learned. Then, if mother grows no worse, I'll walk back to Uncle Bart's shop and spend the night there just—just to be near, that's all."

"You couldn't hear Waitstill, even if she called," Rod said.

"Couldn't I? A man's ears are very sharp under certain circumstances. I believe if Waitstill needed help I could hear her breathe! Besides, I shall be up and down the hill till I know all's well, and at sunrise I'll go up and hide behind some of Baxter's buildings till I see him get his breakfast and go to the store. Now wash your dishes." And Ivory caught up his cap from a hook behind the door.

"Are you going to the barn?" asked Rodman.

"No, only down to the gate for a minute. Mark said that if he had a good chance he'd send a boy with a note and get him to put it under the stone gate post. It's too soon to expect it perhaps, but I can't seem to keep still."

Rodman tied a gingham apron around his waist, carried the teakettle to the sink and poured the dishpan full of boiling water, then dipped the cups and plates in and out, wiped them and replaced them on the table, gave the bean platter a special polish and set the half mince pie and the butter dish in the cellarway.

"A boy has to do most everything in this family," he sighed to himself. "I don't mind washing dishes, except the nasty frying pan and the sticky bean pot, but what I'm going to do tonight is different—here he glowed and tingled with anticipation—"I know what they call it in the story books—it's sentry duty, and that's braver work for a boy than dish washing."

Which, however, depends a good deal upon circumstances and somewhat on the point of view.

CHAPTER XXVII.
The House of Aaron.

A FEELING that the day was to bring great things had dawned upon Waitstill when she woke that morning, and now it was coming true.

Climbing Saco hill was like climbing the hill of her dreams; life and love beckoned to her across the snowy slopes.

At rest about Patty's future, though troubled as to her sorry plight at the moment, she was conscious chiefly of her newborn freedom. She revealed in the keen air that tingled against her cheek and drew in fresh hope with every breath. As she trod the shining

pathway she was full of expectancy, her eyes dancing, her heart as buoyant as her step. Not a vestige of confusion or uncertainty vexed her mind. She knew Ivory for her true mate, and if the way to him took her through dark places it was lighted by a steadfast beacon of love.

(Continued next week.)

Stevenson's Lack of Grammar.
Robert Louis Stevenson's biographer says of him: "In every language he learned the grammar remained unlearned to him, however correctly he might use its idioms, and the spelling of his own tongue was dark to him to the very last."

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Dolly's Ailment.
In Chicago a small Unitarian girl of four, whose father, a bank official, had complained more than once that the income tax made him sick, was playing that her doll was ill. Her mother asked, "What is the matter with dolly?" The child replied, "I think she has the income tax."

Seem to Have Defied Ill Luck.
The superstition concerning the ill luck of the mystic number 13 is said to be waning. It may be pointed out that the original colonies were 13 in number and that up to going to press they have not met with any especial misfortune.

Easily Elucidated.
Johnny, asked a little miss of her small brother, "what is a widower?" "I'm surprised at such ignorance," replied Johnny. "Anybody ought to know that a widower is a widow's husband."

Brainy.
Brains of Chicago men who desert their wives are to be examined and no attention is to be paid to the puerility of the deserted wives. These new methods set one to thinking—Chicago News.

Making Lilies Grow.
Calla lilies will show wonderful improvement if a cup of hot water is poured on them now and then.

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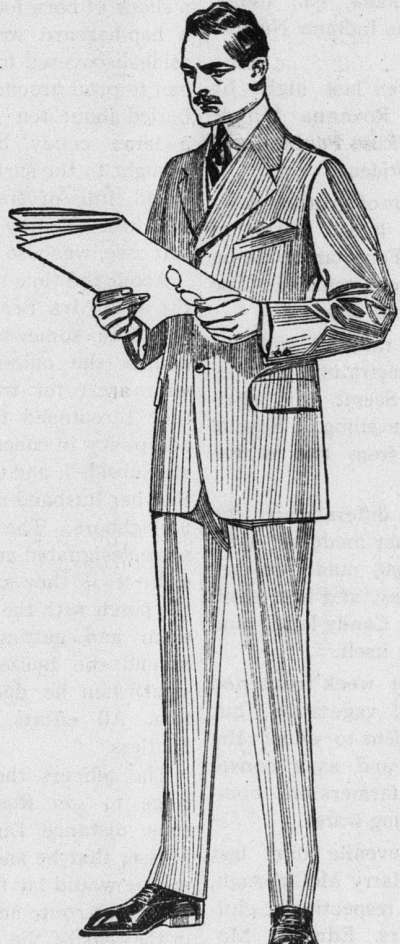
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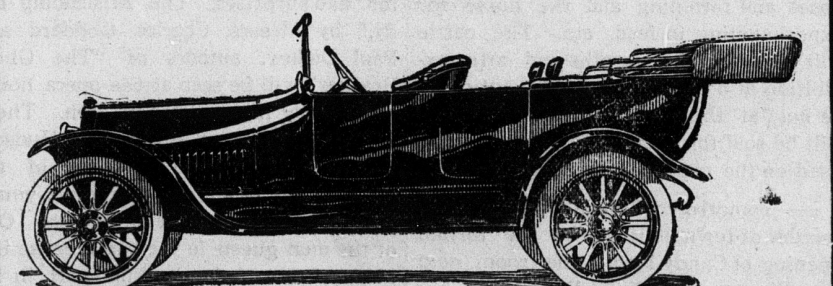
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