

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 paw, 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 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.

Left by his daughters, the deacon cannot manage his household. Waitstill visits the Boyntons.

(Continued from last week.)

At the top of the hill she turned the corner breathlessly and faced the length of road that led to the Boynton farm. Mrs. Mason's house was beyond, and, oh, how she hoped that Ivory would be at home and that she need not wait another day to tell him all and claim the gift she knew was hers before she asked it! She might not have the same exaltation tomorrow, for now there were no levels in her heart and soul. She had a sense of mounting from height to height and lighting fires on every peak of her being. She took no heed of the road she was traveling. She was conscious only of a wonderful inward glow.

The house was now in sight, and a tall figure was issuing from the side door, putting on a fur cap as it came out on the steps and down the lane. Ivory was at home, then, and, best of all, he was unconsciously coming to meet her, although their hearts had been coming to meet each other, she thought, ever since they first began to beat.

As she neared the bars she called Ivory's name. His hands were in the pockets of his great coat, and his eyes were fixed on the ground. Somber he was, distinctly somber, in mien and gait. Could she make him smile and flush and glow as she was smiling and flushing and glowing? As he heard her voice he raised his head quickly and incomprehensibly.

"Don't come any nearer," she said, "until I have told you something."

His mind had been so full of her that the sight of her in the flesh, standing twenty feet away, bewildered him.

She took a few steps nearer the gate, near enough now for him to see her rosy face framed in a blue hood and to catch the brightness of her eyes under their lovely lashes. Ordinarily they were cool and limpid and grave, Waitstill's eyes. Now a sunbeam danced in each of them. And her lips, almost always tightly closed, as if she were holding back her natural speech—her lips were red and parted, and the soul of her, free at last, shone through

her face, making it luminous with a new beauty.

"I have left home for good and all," she said. "I'll tell you more of this later on, but I have left my father's house with nothing to my name but the clothes I stand in. I am going to look for work in the mills tomorrow, but I stopped here to say that I'm ready to marry you whenever you want me—if you do want me."

Ivory was bewildered, indeed, but not so much so that he failed to apprehend and instantly, too, the real significance of this speech. He took a couple of long strides, and before Waitstill had any idea of his intentions he vaulted over the bars and gathered her in his arms.

"Never shall you go to the mills. Never shall you leave my sight for a single hour again, my one woman in all the world. Come to me to be loved and treasured all your life long. I've worshiped you ever since I was a boy. I've kept my heart sweet and garnished for you and no other, hoping I might win you at last."

How glorious to hear all this delicious poetry of love and to feel Ivory's arms about her, making the dream seem sure!

"Oh, how like you to shorten the time of my waiting!" he went on, his words fairly chasing one another in their eagerness to be spoken. "How



How Glorious to Feel Ivory's Arms About Her.

like you to count on me, to guess my hunger for your love, to realize the chains that held me back and break them yourself with your own dear, womanly hands! How like you, oh, wonderful Waitstill!"

Ivory went on murmuring phrases that had been lying in his heart unsaid for years, scarcely conscious of what he was saying, realizing only that the miracle of miracles had happened.

Waitstill, for her part, was almost dumb with joy to be lying so close to his heart that she could hear it beating, to feel the passionate tenderness of his embrace and his kiss falling upon her hair.

"I did not know a girl could be so happy!" she whispered. "I've dreamed of it, but it was nothing like this. I am all a-tremble with it."

Ivory held her off at arm's length for a moment, reluctantly, grudgingly. "You took me fairly off my feet, dearest," he said, "and I forgot everything but the one supreme fact you were telling me. Had I been on guard I should have told you that I am no worthy husband for you, Waitstill. I haven't enough to offer such a girl as you."

"You're too late, Ivory! You showed me your heart first, and now you are searching your mind for bugbears to frighten me."

"I am a poor man."

"No girl could be poorer than I am."

"After what you've endured you ought to have rest and comfort."

"I shall have both—in you!" This with eyes, all wet, lifted to Ivory's.

"My mother is a great burden—a very dear and precious but a grievous one."

"She needs a daughter. It is in such things that I shall be your helpmate."

"Will not the boy trouble you and add to your cares?"

"Rod? I love him; he shall be my little brother."

"What if my father were not really dead? I think of this sometimes in the night! What if he should wander back, broken in spirit, feeble in body, empty in purse?"

"I do not come to you free of burdens. If my father is deserted by all I must see that he is made comfortable. He never treated me like a daughter, but I acknowledge his claim."

"Mine is such a gloomy home!"

"Will it be gloomy when I am in it?" and Waitstill, usually so grave, laughed at last like a care-free child.

Ivory felt himself hidden in the beautiful shelter of the girl's love.

It was dark now, or as dark as the night ever is that has moonlight and snow. He took Waitstill in his arms again reverently and laid his cheek against her hair. "I worship God as well as I know how," he whispered, "worship him as the maker of this big heaven and earth that surrounds us. But I worship you as the maker of my little heaven and earth, and my heart is saying its prayers to you at this very moment!"

"Hush, my dear! Hush! And don't value me too much or I shall lose my head—I that have never known a sweet word in all my life save those that my sister has given me. I must tell you all about Patty now."

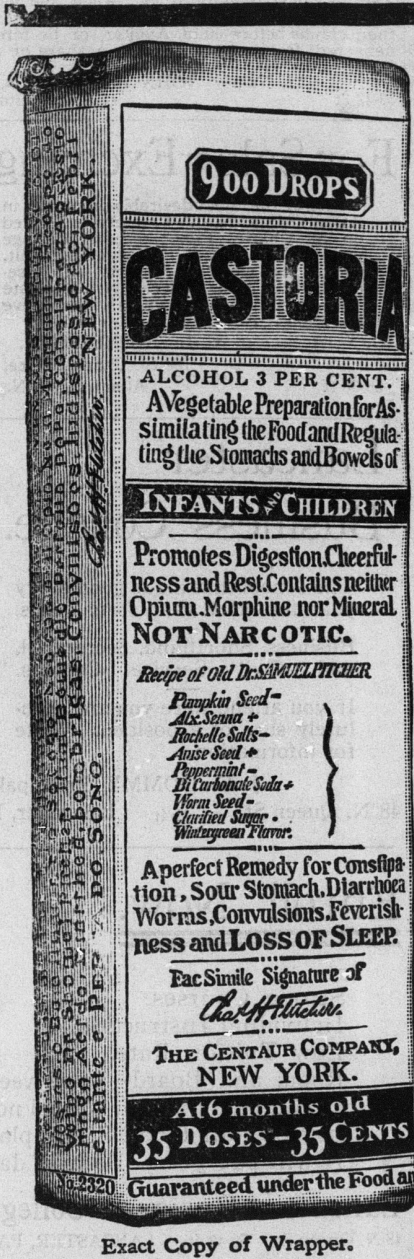
"I happen to know more than you, dear. I met her at the bridge when I was coming home from the woods and I saw her safely to Uncle Bart's door. I don't know why we speak of it as Uncle Bart's when it is really Aunt Abby's! I next met Mark, who had fairly flown from Bridgton on the wings of love, arriving hours ahead of time. I managed to keep him from avenging the insults heaped upon his bride, and he has driven to the Mills to confide in his father and mother. By this time Patty is probably the center of the family group, charming them all, as is her custom."

"Oh, I am so glad Mark is at home! Now I can be at rest about Patty. And I must not linger another moment, for I am going to ask Mrs. Mason to keep me overnight!" cried Waitstill, bethinking herself suddenly of time and place.

"I will take you there myself and explain everything. And the moment I've lighted a fire in Mrs. Mason's best bedroom and settled you there, what do you think I am going to do? I shall drive to the town clerk's house, and if he is in bed, rout him out and have the notice of our intended marriage post-
(Continued on page 7, Col. 1)

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