

THE STORY OF WAITSTILL BAXTER

(Continued from page two.)

"I'd like to see," exclaimed Rodman, his big dark eyes sparkling with anticipation. "I don't have many boys to play with, and I never want to a picnic. Aunt Boynton watches for me most all the time. She doesn't know he has been away for years and years. When she doesn't watch she prays. Sometimes she wants me to pray with her, but praying don't come easy to me."

"Neither does it to me," said Patty. "I'm good at marbles and checkers and backgammon and jack straws, though."

"So am I," said Patty, laughing. "So we should be good friends. I'll try to get a chance to see you soon again, but perhaps I can't; I'm a good deal tied at home."

"Your father doesn't like you to go anywhere," I guess, interposed Rodman. "I've heard Ivory tell Aunt Boynton things, but I wouldn't repeat them. Ivory's trained me years and years not to tell anything, so I don't."

"That's a good boy," approved Patty. Then as she regarded him more closely, she continued, "I'm sorry you're lonesome, Rodman. I'd like to see you look brighter."

"You think I've been crying," the boy said shrewdly. "So I have, but not because I've been punished. The reason my eyes are so swollen up is because I killed our old toad by mistake this morning. I was trying to see if I could swing the scythe so's to help Ivory in haying time. I've only raked after, and I want to begin on mowing soon's I can. Then, somehow or other, the old toad came out from under the steps. I didn't see him, and the scythe hit him square. I cried for an hour, that's what I did, and I don't care who knows it, except I wouldn't like the boys at school to hector me. I've buried the toad out behind the barn, and I hope Ivory'll let me keep the news from Aunt Boynton. She cries enough now without my telling her there's been a death in the family. She set great store by the old toad, and so did all of us."

"It's too bad. I'm sorry. But, after all, you couldn't help it."

"No, but we should always look round everywhere when we're cutting—that's what Ivory says. He says folks shouldn't use edged tools till they're old enough not to fool with 'em."

And Rodman looked so wise and old fashioned for his years that Patty did not know whether to kiss him or cry over him as she said: "Ivory's always right. And now, goodby. I must go this very minute. Don't forget the picnic."

"I won't!" cried the boy, gazing after her, wholly entranced with her bright beauty and her kindness. "Say, I'll bring something, too—white oak acorns, if you like 'em. I've got a big bagful up attic!"

Patty sped down the long lane, crept under the bars and flew like a lawning over the highroad. "If father was only like any one else things might be so different!" she sighed, her thoughts running along with her feet. "Nobody to make a home for that poor lonesome little boy and that poor lonesome big Ivory. I am sure that he is in love with Waitstill. He doesn't know it. She doesn't know it. Nobody does but me, but I'm clever at guessing. I was the only one that surmised Jed Morrill was going to marry again. I should almost like Ivory for myself, he is so tall and handsome, but of course he can never marry anybody. He is too poor and has his mother to look after. I wouldn't want to take him from Wally, though, and then perhaps I couldn't get him anyway. If I couldn't, he'd be the only one! I have never tried yet, but I feel in my bones, somehow, that I could have any boy in Edgewood or Riverboro by just crooking my forefinger and beckoning to him. I wish—I wish they were different! They don't make me want to beckon to them! My forefinger just stays straight and doesn't feel like crooking! There's Cephas Cole, but he's as stupid as an owl. I don't want a husband that keeps his mouth wide open whenever I'm talking, no matter whether it's sense or nonsense. There's Phil Perry, but he likes Ellen, and besides, he's too serious for me. And

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there's Mark Wilson, he's the best dressed and the only one that's been to college. He looks at me all the time in meeting, and asked me if I wouldn't take a walk some Sunday afternoon. I know he planned Ellen's party hoping I'd be there! Goodness gracious, I do believe that is his horse coming behind me! There's no other in the village that goes at such a gait!" It was, indeed, Mark Wilson, who always drove, according to Aunt Abby Cole, "as if he was goin' for a doctor." He caught up with Patty almost in the twinkling of an eye, but she was ready for him. She had taken off her sunbonnet just to twirl it by the string, she was so warm with walking, and in a jiffy she had lifted the clustering curls from her ears, tucked them back with a single expert movement and disclosed two coral pendants just the color of her ear tips and her glowing cheeks.

"Hello, Patty!" the young man called in brusque country fashion as he reined up beside her. "What are you doing over here? Why aren't you on your way to the party? I've been over to Limington and am breaking my neck to get home in time myself."

"I am not going. There are no parties for me," said Patty plaintively.

"Not going! Oh, I say, what's the matter? It won't be a bit of fun without you. Ellen and I made it up expressly for you, thinking your father couldn't object to a candy pull."

"I can't help it. I did the best I could. Waitstill always asks father for me, but I wouldn't take any chances today, and I spoke to him myself. Indeed, I almost coaxed him."

"He's a regular old skinflint," cried Mark, getting out of the wagon, and walking beside her.

"You mustn't call him names," Patty interposed, with some dignity. "I call him a good many myself, but I'm his daughter."

"You don't look it," said Mark admiringly. "Come and have a little ride, won't you?"

"Oh, I couldn't possibly, thank you. Some one would be sure to see us, and father's so strict."

"There isn't a building for half a mile. Just jump in and have a spin till we come to the first house; then I'll let you out, and you can walk the rest of the way home. Come, do, and make up to me a little for my disappointment. I'll skip the candy pull if you say the word."

It was an incredibly brief drive at Mark's rate of speed and as exciting and blissful as it was brief and dangerous. Patty thought. Did she imagine it or did Mark help her into the wagon differently from—old Dr. Perry, for instance?

The fresh breeze lifted the gold thread of her curls and gave her cheeks a brighter color, while her breath came fast through her parted lips and her eyes sparkled at the unexpected, unaccounted pleasure. She felt so grown up, so conscious of a new power, as she sat enthroned on the little wagon seat (Mark Wilson always liked his baggies "country size," so the neighbors said) that she was almost courageous enough to agree to make a royal progress through the village—almost, but not quite.

"Come on, let's shake the old sables up and start 'em talking, shall we?" Mark suggested. "I'll give you the reins and let Nero have a lick of the whip."

"No, I'd rather not drive," she said. "I'd be afraid of this horse and, anyway, I must get out this very minute—yes, I really must. If you hold Nero I can just slip down between the wheels. You needn't help me." Mark alighted notwithstanding her objections, saying gallantly, "I don't miss this pleasure, not by a jugful! Come along! Jump!" Patty stretched out her hands to be helped, but Mark forestalled her by putting his arms around her and lifting her down. A second of time only was involved, but in that second he held her close and kissed her warm cheek, her cheek that had never felt the touch of any lips but those of Waitstill. She pulled her sunbonnet over her flaming face, while Mark, with a gay smile of farewell, sprang into the wagon and gave his horse a free rein. Patty never looked up from the road, but walked faster and faster, her heart beating at breakneck speed. It was a changed world that spun past her. Fright, triumph, shame, delight, gratified vanity swam over her in turn. A few minutes later she heard once more the rattle of wheels on the road. It was, Cephas Cole, driving toward her over the brow of Saco hill. "He'll have seen Mark," she thought, "but he can't know I've talked and driven with him. Ugh! how stupid and common he looks!" "I heard your father blowin' the

(Continued on page seven.)

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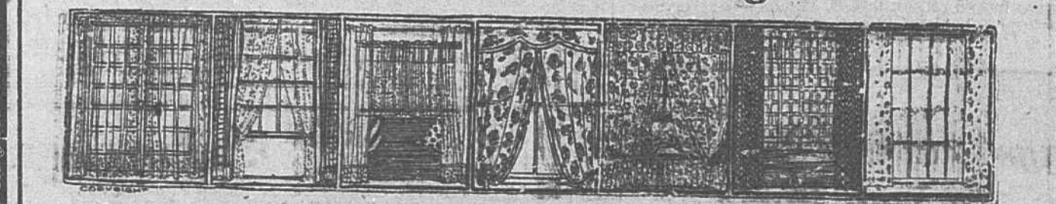
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\$2.50 Lace Curtains	\$1.98
\$3.00 Lace Curtains	\$2.98
\$4.00 Lace Curtains	\$3.98
\$5.00 Lace Curtains	\$4.98
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