WIGGIN KATE SMITH

THE STORY OF WAITSTILL BAXTER

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Содержание

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SPRING

I. SACO WATER

FAR, far up, in the bosom of New Hampshire's granite hills, the Saco has its birth. As the mountain rill gathers strength it takes

> "Through Bartlett's vales its tuneful way,
> Or hides in Conway's fragrant brakes,
> Retreating from the glare of day."

Now it leaves the mountains and flows through "green Fryeburg's woods and farms." In the course of its frequent turns and twists and bends, it meets with many another stream, and sends it, fuller and stronger, along its rejoicing way. When it has journeyed more than a hundred miles and is nearing the ocean, it greets the Great Ossipee River and accepts its crystal tribute. Then, in its turn, the Little Ossipee joins forces, and the river, now a splendid stream, flows onward to Bonny Eagle, to

Moderation and to Salmon Falls, where it dashes over the dam like a young Niagara and hurtles, in a foamy torrent, through the ragged defile cut between lofty banks of solid rock.

Widening out placidly for a moment's rest in the sunny reaches near Pleasant Point, it gathers itself for a new plunge at Union Falls, after which it speedily merges itself in the bay and is fresh water no more.

At one of the falls on the Saco, the two little hamlets of Edgewood and Riverboro nestle together at the bridge and make one village. The stream is a wonder of beauty just here; a mirror of placid loveliness above the dam, a tawny, roaring wonder at the fall, and a mad, white-flecked torrent as it dashes on its way to the ocean.

The river has seen strange sights in its time, though the history of these two tiny villages is quite unknown to the great world outside. They have been born, waxed strong, and fallen almost to decay while Saco Water has tumbled over the rocks and spent itself in its impetuous journey to the sea.

It remembers the yellow-moccasined Sokokis as they issued from the Indian Cellar and carried their birchen canoes along the wooded shore. It was in those years that the silver-skinned salmon leaped in its crystal depths; the otter and the beaver crept with sleek wet skins upon its shore; and the brown deer came down to quench his thirst at its brink while at twilight the stealthy forms of bear and panther and wolf were mirrored in its glassy surface.

Time sped; men chained the river's turbulent forces and ordered it to grind at the mill. Then houses and barns appeared along its banks, bridges were built, orchards planted, forests changed into farms, white-painted meetinghouses gleamed through the trees and distant bells rang from their steeples on quiet Sunday mornings.

All at once myriads of great hewn logs vexed its downward course, slender logs linked together in long rafts, and huge logs drifting down singly or in pairs. Men appeared, running hither and thither like ants, and going through mysterious operations the reason for which the river could never guess: but the mill-wheels turned, the great saws buzzed, the smoke from tavern chimneys rose in the air, and the rattle and clatter of stage-coaches resounded along the road.

Now children paddled with bare feet in the river's sandy coves and shallows, and lovers sat on its alder-shaded banks and exchanged their vows just where the shuffling bear was wont to come down and drink.

The Saco could remember the "cold year," when there was a black frost every month of the twelve, and though almost all the corn along its shores shrivelled on the stalk, there were two farms where the vapor from the river saved the crops, and all the seed for the next season came from the favored spot, to be known as "Egypt" from that day henceforward.

Strange, complex things now began to happen, and the river played its own part in some of these, for there were disastrous

freshets, the sudden breaking-up of great jams of logs, and the drowning of men who were engulfed in the dark whirlpool below the rapids.

Caravans, with menageries of wild beasts, crossed the bridge now every year. An infuriated elephant lifted the side of the old Edgewood Tavern barn, and the wild laughter of the roistering rum-drinkers who were tantalizing the animals floated down to the river's edge. The roar of a lion, tearing and chewing the arm of one of the bystanders, and the cheers of the throng when a plucky captain of the local militia thrust a stake down the beast's throat,—these sounds displaced the former war-whoop of the Indians and the ring of the axe in the virgin forests along the shores.

There were days, and moonlight nights, too, when strange sights and sounds of quite another nature could have been noted by the river as it flowed under the bridge that united the two little villages.

Issuing from the door of the Riverboro Town House, and winding down the hill, through the long row of teams and carriages that lined the roadside, came a procession of singing men and singing women. Convinced of sin, but entranced with promised pardon; spiritually intoxicated by the glowing eloquence of the latter-day prophet they were worshipping, the band of "Cochranites" marched down the dusty road and across the bridge, dancing, swaying, waving handkerchiefs, and shouting hosannas.

God watched, and listened, knowing that there would be other prophets, true and false, in the days to come, and other processions following them; and the river watched and listened too, as it hurried on towards the sea with its story of the present that was sometime to be the history of the past.

When Jacob Cochrane was leading his overwrought, ecstatic band across the river, Waitstill Baxter, then a child, was watching the strange, noisy company from the window of a little brick dwelling on the top of the Town-House Hill.

Her stepmother stood beside her with a young baby in her arms, but when she saw what held the gaze of the child she drew her away, saying: "We mustn't look, Waitstill; your father don't like it!"

"Who was the big man at the head, mother?"

"His name is Jacob Cochrane, but you mustn't think or talk about him; he is very wicked."

"He doesn't look any wickeder than the others," said the child. "Who was the man that fell down in the road, mother, and the woman that knelt and prayed over him? Why did he fall, and why did she pray, mother?"

"That was Master Aaron Boynton, the schoolmaster, and his wife. He only made believe to fall down, as the Cochranites do; the way they carry on is a disgrace to the village, and that's the reason your father won't let us look at them."

"I played with a nice boy over to Boynton's," mused the child.

"That was Ivory, their only child. He is a good little fellow,

but his mother and father will spoil him with their crazy ways."

"I hope nothing will happen to him, for I love him," said the child gravely. "He showed me a humming-bird's nest, the first ever I saw, and the littlest!"

"Don't talk about loving him," chided the woman. "If your father should hear you, he'd send you to bed without your porridge."

"Father couldn't hear me, for I never speak when he's at home," said grave little Waitstill. "And I'm used to going to bed without my porridge."

II. THE SISTERS

THE river was still running under the bridge, but the current of time had swept Jacob Cochrane out of sight, though not out of mind, for he had left here and there a disciple to preach his strange and uncertain doctrine. Waitstill, the child who never spoke in her father's presence, was a young woman now, the mistress of the house; the stepmother was dead, and the baby a girl of seventeen.

The brick cottage on the hilltop had grown only a little shabbier. Deacon Foxwell Baxter still slammed its door behind him every morning at seven o'clock and, without any such cheerful conventions as good-byes to his girls, walked down to the bridge to open his store.

The day, properly speaking, had opened when Waitstill and Patience had left their beds at dawn, built the fire, fed the hens and turkeys, and prepared the breakfast, while the Deacon was graining the horse and milking the cows. Such minor "chores" as carrying water from the well, splitting kindling, chopping pine, or bringing wood into the kitchen, were left to Waitstill, who had a strong back, or, if she had not, had never been unwise enough to mention the fact in her father's presence. The almanac day, however, which opened with sunrise, had nothing to do with the real human day, which always began when Mr. Baxter slammed the door behind him, and reached its high noon of delight when

he disappeared from view.

"He's opening the store shutters!" chanted Patience from the heights of a kitchen chair by the window. "Now he's taken his cane and beaten off the Boynton puppy that was sitting on the steps as usual,—I don't mean Ivory's dog" (here the girl gave a quick glance at her sister), "but Rodman's little yellow cur. Rodman must have come down to the bridge on some errand for Ivory. Isn't it odd, when that dog has all the other store steps to sit upon, he should choose father's, when every bone in his body must tell him how father hates him and the whole Boynton family."

"Father has no real cause that I ever heard of; but some dogs never know when they've had enough beating, nor some people either." said Waitstill, speaking from the pantry.

"Don't be gloomy when it's my birthday, Sis!—Now he's opened the door and kicked the cat! All is ready for business at the Baxter store."

"I wish you weren't quite so free with your tongue, Patty."

"Somebody must talk," retorted the girl, jumping down from the chair and shaking back her mop of red-gold curls. "I'll put this hateful, childish, round comb in and out just once more, then it will disappear forever. This very after-noon up goes my hair!"

"You know it will be of no use unless you braid it very plainly and neatly. Father will take notice and make you smooth it down."

"Father hasn't looked me square in the face for years; besides,

my hair won't braid, and nothing can make it quite plain and neat, thank goodness! Let us be thankful for small mercies, as Jed Morrill said when the lightning struck his mother-in-law and skipped his wife."

"Patty, I will not permit you to repeat those tavern stories; they are not seemly on the lips of a girl!" And Waitstill came out of the pantry with a shadow of disapproval in her eyes and in her voice.

Patty flung her arms round her sister tempestuously, and pulled out the waves of her hair so that it softened her face.—"I'll be good," she said, "and oh, Waity! let's invent some sort of cheap happiness for to-day! I shall never be seventeen again and we have so many troubles! Let's put one of the cows in the horse's stall and see what will happen! Or let's spread up our beds with the head at the foot and put the chest of drawers on the other side of the room, or let's make candy! Do you think father would miss the molasses if we only use a cupful? Couldn't we strain the milk, but leave the churning and the dishes for an hour or two, just once? If you say 'yes' I can think of something wonderful to do!"

"What is it?" asked Waitstill, relenting at the sight of the girl's eager, roguish face.

"PIERCE MY EARS!" cried Patty. "Say you will!"

"Oh! Patty, Patty, I am afraid you are given over to vanity! I daren't let you wear eardrops without father's permission."

"Why not? Lots of church members wear them, so it can't be a mortal sin. Father is against all adornments, but that's because

he doesn't want to buy them. You've always said I should have your mother's coral pendants when I was old enough. Here I am, seventeen today, and Dr. Perry says I am already a well-favored young woman. I can pull my hair over my ears for a few days and when the holes are all made and healed, even father cannot make me fill them up again. Besides, I'll never wear the earrings at home!"

"Oh! my dear, my dear!" sighed Waitstill, with a half-sob in her voice. "If only I was wise enough to know how we could keep from these little deceits, yet have any liberty or comfort in life!"

"We can't! The Lord couldn't expect us to bear all that we bear," exclaimed Patty, "without our trying once in a while to have a good time in our own way. We never do a thing that we are ashamed of, or that other girls don't do every day in the week; only our pleasures always have to be taken behind father's back. It's only me that's ever wrong, anyway, for you are always an angel. It's a burning shame and you only twenty-one yourself. I'll pierce your ears if you say so, and let you wear your own coral drops!"

"No, Patty; I've outgrown those longings years ago. When your mother died and left father and you and the house to me, my girlhood died, too, though I was only thirteen."

"It was only your inside girlhood that died," insisted Patty stoutly, "The outside is as fresh as the paint on Uncle Barty's new ell. You've got the loveliest eyes and hair in Riverboro, and you know it; besides, Ivory Boynton would tell you so if you didn't.

Come and bore my ears, there's a darling!"

"Ivory Boynton never speaks a word of my looks, nor a word that father and all the world mightn't hear." And Waitstill flushed.

"Then it's because he's shy and silent and has so many troubles of his own that he doesn't dare say anything. When my hair is once up and the coral pendants are swinging in my ears, I shall expect to hear something about MY looks, I can tell you. Waity, after all, though we never have what we want to eat, and never a decent dress to our backs, nor a young man to cross the threshold, I wouldn't change places with Ivory Boynton, would you?" Here Patty swept the hearth vigorously with a turkey wing and added a few corncobs to the fire.

Waitstill paused a moment in her task of bread-kneading. "Well," she answered critically, "at least we know where our father is."

"We do, indeed! We also know that he is thoroughly alive!"

"And though people do talk about him, they can't say the things they say of Master Aaron Boynton. I don't believe father would ever run away and desert us."

"I fear not," said Patty. "I wish the angels would put the idea into his head, though, of course, it wouldn't be the angels; they'd be above it. It would have to be the 'Old Driver,' as Jed Morrill calls the Evil One; but whoever did it, the result would be the same: we should be deserted, and live happily ever after. Oh! to be deserted, and left with you alone on this hilltop, what joy it

would be!"

Waitstill frowned, but did not interfere further with Patty's intemperate speech. She knew that she was simply serving as an escape-valve, and that after the steam was "let off" she would be more rational.

"Of course, we are motherless," continued Patty wistfully, "but poor Ivory is worse than motherless."

"No, not worse, Patty," said Waitstill, taking the bread-board and moving towards the closet. "Ivory loves his mother and she loves him, with all the mind she has left! She has the best blood of New England flowing in her veins, and I suppose it was a great come down for her to marry Aaron Boynton, clever and gifted though he was. Now Ivory has to protect her, poor, daft, innocent creature, and hide her away from the gossip of the village. He is surely the best of sons, Ivory Boynton!"

"She is a terrible care for him, and like to spoil his life," said Patty.

"There are cares that swell the heart and make it bigger and warmer, Patty, just as there are cares that shrivel it and leave it tired and cold. Love lightens Ivory's afflictions but that is something you and I have to do without, so it seems."

"I suppose little Rodman is some comfort to the Boyntons, even if he is only ten." Patty suggested.

"No doubt. He's a good little fellow, and though it's rather hard for Ivory to be burdened for these last five years with the support of a child who's no nearer kin than a cousin, still he's

of use, minding Mrs. Boynton and the house when Ivory's away. The school-teacher says he is wonderful at his books and likely to be a great credit to the Boyntons some day or other."

"You've forgot to name our one great blessing, Waity, and I believe, anyway, you're talking to keep my mind off the earrings!"

"You mean we've each other? No, Patty, I never forget that, day or night. 'Tis that makes me willing to bear any burden father chooses to put upon us.—Now the bread is set, but I don't believe I have the courage to put a needle into your tender flesh, Patty; I really don't."

"Nonsense! I've got the waxed silk all ready and chosen the right-sized needle and I'll promise not to jump or screech more than I can help. We'll make a tiny lead-pencil dot right in the middle of the lobe, then you place the needle on it, shut your eyes, and JAB HARD! I expect to faint, but when I 'come to,' we can decide which of us will pull the needle through to the other side. Probably it will be you, I'm such a coward. If it hurts dreadfully, I'll have only one pierced to-day and take the other to-morrow; and if it hurts very dreadfully, perhaps I'll go through life with one ear-ring. Aunt Abby Cole will say it's just odd enough to suit me!"

"You'll never go through life with one tongue at the rate you use it now," chided Waitstill, "for it will never last you. Come, we'll take the work-basket and go out in the barn where no one will see or hear us."

“Goody, goody! Come along!” and Patty clapped her hands in triumph. “Have you got the pencil and the needle and the waxed silk? Then bring the camphor bottle to revive me, and the coral pendants, too, just to give me courage. Hurry up! It’s ten o’clock. I was born at sun-rise, so I’m ‘going on’ eighteen and can’t waste any time!”

III. DEACON BAXTER'S WIVES

FOXWELL BAXTER was ordinarily called "Old Foxy" by the boys of the district, and also, it is to be feared, by the men gathered for evening conference at the various taverns, or at one of the rival village stores.

He had a small farm of fifteen or twenty acres, with a pasture, a wood lot, and a hay-field, but the principal source of his income came from trading. His sign bore the usual legend: "WEST INDIA GOODS AND GROCERIES," and probably the most profitable articles in his stock were rum, molasses, sugar, and tobacco; but there were chests of rice, tea, coffee, and spices, barrels of pork in brine, as well as piles of cotton and woolen cloth on the shelves above the counters. His shop window, seldom dusted or set in order, held a few clay pipes, some glass jars of peppermint or sassafras lozenges, black licorice, stick-candy, and sugar gooseberries. These dainties were seldom renewed, for it was only a very bold child, or one with an ungovernable appetite for sweets, who would have spent his penny at Foxy Baxter's store.

He was thought a sharp and shrewd trader, but his honesty was never questioned; indeed, the only trait in his character that ever came up for general discussion was his extraordinary, unbelievable, colossal meanness. This so eclipsed every other passion in the man, and loomed so bulkily and insistently in the

foreground, that had he cherished a second vice no one would have observed it, and if he really did possess a casual virtue, it could scarcely have reared its head in such ugly company.

It might be said, to defend the fair name of the Church, that Mr. Baxter's deaconhood did not include very active service in the courts of the Lord. He had "experienced religion" at fifteen and made profession of his faith, but all well-brought-up boys and girls did the same in those days; their parents saw to that! If change of conviction or backsliding occurred later on, that was not their business! At the ripe age of twenty-five he was selected to fill a vacancy and became a deacon, thinking it might be good for trade, as it was, for some years. He was very active at the time of the "Cochrane craze," since any defence of the creed that included lively detective work and incessant spying on his neighbors was particularly in his line; but for many years now, though he had been regular in attendance at church, he had never officiated at communion, and his diaconal services had gradually lapsed into the passing of the contribution-box, a task of which he never wearied; it was such a keen pleasure to make other people yield their pennies for a good cause, without adding any of his own!

Deacon Baxter had now been a widower for some years and the community had almost relinquished the idea of his seeking a fourth wife. This was a matter of some regret, for there was a general feeling that it would be a good thing for the Baxter girls to have some one to help with the housework and act as a buffer

between them and their grim and irascible parent. As for the women of the village, they were mortified that the Deacon had been able to secure three wives, and refused to believe that the universe held anywhere a creature benighted enough to become his fourth.

The first, be it said, was a mere ignorant girl, and he a beardless youth of twenty, who may not have shown his true qualities so early in life. She bore him two sons, and it was a matter of comment at the time that she called them, respectively, Job and Moses, hoping that the endurance and meekness connected with these names might somehow help them in their future relations with their father. Pneumonia, coupled with profound discouragement, carried her off in a few years to make room for the second wife, Waitstill's mother, who was of different fibre and greatly his superior. She was a fine, handsome girl, the orphan daughter of up-country gentle-folks, who had died when she was eighteen, leaving her alone in the world and penniless.

Baxter, after a few days' acquaintance, drove into the dooryard of the house where she was a visitor and, showing her his two curly-headed boys, suddenly asked her to come and be their stepmother. She assented, partly because she had nothing else to do with her existence, so far as she could see, and also because she fell in love with the children at first sight and forgot, as girls will, that it was their father whom she was marrying.

She was as plucky and clever and spirited as she was

handsome, and she made a brave fight of it with Foxy; long enough to bring a daughter into the world, to name her Waitstill, and start her a little way on her life journey,—then she, too, gave up the struggle and died. Typhoid fever it was, combined with complete loss of illusions, and a kind of despairing rage at having made so complete a failure of her existence.

The next year, Mr. Baxter, being unusually busy, offered a man a good young heifer if he would jog about the country a little and pick him up a housekeeper; a likely woman who would, if she proved energetic, economical, and amiable, be eventually raised to the proud position of his wife. If she was young, healthy, smart, tidy, capable, and a good manager, able to milk the cows, harness the horse, and make good butter, he would give a dollar and a half a week. The woman was found, and, incredible as it may seem, she said "yes" when the Deacon (whose ardor was kindled at having paid three months' wages) proposed a speedy marriage. The two boys by this time had reached the age of discretion, and one of them evinced the fact by promptly running away to parts unknown, never to be heard from afterwards; while the other, a reckless and unhappy lad, was drowned while running on the logs in the river. Old Foxy showed little outward sign of his loss, though he had brought the boys into the world solely with the view of having one of them work on the farm and the other in the store.

His third wife, the one originally secured for a housekeeper, bore him a girl, very much to his disgust, a girl named Patience,

and great was Waitstill's delight at this addition to the dull household. The mother was a timid, colorless, docile creature, but Patience nevertheless was a sparkling, bright-eyed baby, who speedily became the very centre of the universe to the older child. So the months and years wore on, drearily enough, until, when Patience was nine, the third Mrs. Baxter succumbed after the manner of her predecessors, and slipped away from a life that had grown intolerable. The trouble was diagnosed as "liver complaint," but scarcity of proper food, no new frocks or kind words, hard work, and continual bullying may possibly have been contributory causes. Dr. Perry thought so, for he had witnessed three most contented deaths in the Baxter house. The ladies were all members of the church and had presumably made their peace with God, but the good doctor fancied that their pleasure in joining the angels was mild compared with their relief at parting with the Deacon.

"I know I hadn't ought to put the care on you, Waitstill, and you only thirteen," poor Mrs. Baxter sighed, as the young girl was watching with her one night when the end seemed drawing near. "I've made out to live till now when Patience is old enough to dress herself and help round, but I'm all beat out and can't try any more."

"Do you mean I'm to take your place, be a mother to Patience, and keep house, and everything?" asked Waitstill quaveringly.

"I don't see but you'll have to, unless your father marries again. He'll never hire help, you know that!"

"I won't have another mother in this house," flashed the girl. "There's been three here and that's enough! If he brings anybody home, I'll take Patience and run away, as Job did; or if he leaves me alone, I'll wash and iron and scrub and cook till Patience grows up, and then we'll go off together and hide somewhere. I'm fourteen; oh, mother, how soon could I be married and take Patience to live with me? Do you think anybody will ever want me?"

"Don't marry for a home, Waitstill! Your own mother did that, and so did I, and we were both punished for it! You've been a great help and I've had a sight of comfort out of the baby, but I wouldn't go through it again, not even for her! You're real smart and capable for your age and you've done your full share of the work every day, even when you were at school. You can get along all right."

"I don't know how I'm going to do everything alone," said the girl, forcing back her tears. "You've always made the brown bread, and mine will never suit father. I suppose I can wash, but don't know how to iron starched clothes, nor make pickles, and oh! I can never kill a rooster, mother, it's no use to ask me to! I'm not big enough to be the head of the family."

Mrs. Baxter turned her pale, tired face away from Waitstill's appealing eyes.

"I know," she said faintly. "I hate to leave you to bear the brunt alone, but I must!… Take good care of Patience and don't let her get into trouble.... You won't, will you?"

"I'll be careful," promised Waitstill, sobbing quietly; "I'll do my best."

"You've got more courage than ever I had; don't you s'pose you can stiffen up and defend yourself a little mite?… Your father'd ought to be opposed, for his own good… but I've never seen anybody that dared do it." Then, after a pause, she said with a flash of spirit,—"Anyhow, Waitstill, he's your father after all. He's no blood relation of mine, and I can't stand him another day; that's the reason I'm willing to die."

IV. SOMETHING OF A HERO

IVORY BOYNTON lifted the bars that divided his land from the highroad and walked slowly toward the house. It was April, but there were still patches of snow here and there, fast melting under a drizzling rain. It was a gray world, a bleak, black-and-brown world, above and below. The sky was leaden; the road and the footpath were deep in a muddy ooze flecked with white. The tree-trunks, black, with bare branches, were lined against the gray sky; nevertheless, spring had been on the way for a week, and a few sunny days would bring the yearly miracle for which all hearts were longing.

Ivory was season-wise and his quick eye had caught many a sign as he walked through the woods from his schoolhouse. A new and different color haunted the tree-tops, and one had only to look closely at the elm buds to see that they were beginning to swell. Some fat robins had been sunning about in the school-yard at noon, and sparrows had been chirping and twittering on the fence-rails. Yes, the winter was over, and Ivory was glad, for it had meant no coasting and skating and sleighing for him, but long walks in deep snow or slush; long evenings, good for study, but short days, and greater loneliness for his mother. He could see her now as he neared the house, standing in the open doorway, her hand shading her eyes, watching, always watching, for some one who never came.

"Spring is on the way, mother, but it isn't here yet, so don't stand there in the rain," he called. "Look at the nosegay I gathered for you as I came through the woods. Here are pussy willows and red maple blossoms and Mayflowers, would you believe it?"

Lois Boynton took the handful of budding things and sniffed their fragrance.

"You're late to-night, Ivory," she said. "Rod wanted his supper early so that he could go off to singing-school, but I kept something warm for you, and I'll make you a fresh cup of tea."

Ivory went into the little shed room off the kitchen, changed his muddy boots for slippers, and made himself generally tidy; then he came back to the living-room bringing a pine knot which he flung on the fire, waking it to a brilliant flame.

"We can be as lavish as we like with the stumps now, mother, for spring is coming," he said, as he sat down to his meal.

"I've been looking out more than usual this afternoon," she replied. "There's hardly any snow left, and though the walking is so bad I've been rather expecting your father before night. You remember he said, when he went away in January, that he should be back before the Mayflowers bloomed?"

It did not do any good to say: "Yes, mother, but the Mayflowers have bloomed ten times since father went away." He had tried that, gently and persistently when first her mind began to be confused from long grief and hurt love, stricken pride and sick suspense.

Instead of that, Ivory turned the subject cheerily, saying,

"Well, we're sure of a good season, I think. There's been a grand snow-fall, and that, they say, is the poor man's manure. Rod and I will put in more corn and potatoes this year. I shan't have to work single-handed very long, for he is growing to be quite a farmer."

"Your father was very fond of green corn, but he never cared for potatoes," Mrs. Boynton said, vaguely, taking up her knitting. "I always had great pride in my cooking, but I could never get your father to relish my potatoes."

"Well, his son does, anyway," Ivory replied, helping himself plentifully from a dish that held one of his mother's best concoctions, potatoes minced fine and put together into the spider with thin bits of pork and all browned together.

"I saw the Baxter girls to-day, mother," he continued, not because he hoped she would give any heed to what he said, but from the sheer longing for companionship. "The Deacon drove off with Lawyer Wilson, who wanted him to give testimony in some case or other down in Milltown. The minute Patty saw him going up Saco Hill, she harnessed the old starved Baxter mare and the girls started over to the Lower Corner to see some friends. It seems it's Patty's birthday and they were celebrating. I met them just as they were coming back and helped them lift the rickety wagon out of the mud; they were stuck in it up to the hubs of the wheels. I advised them to walk up the Town-House Hill if they ever expected to get the horse home."

"Town-House Hill!" said Ivory's mother, dropping her knitting. "That was where we had such wonderful meetings!

Truly the Lord was present in our midst, and oh, Ivory! the visions we saw in that place when Jacob Cochrane first unfolded his gospel to us. Was ever such a man!"

"Probably not, mother," remarked Ivory dryly.

"You were speaking of the Baxters. I remember their home, and the little girl who used to stand in the gateway and watch when we came out of meeting. There was a baby, too; isn't there a Baxter baby, Ivory?"

"She didn't stay a baby; she is seventeen years old to-day, mother."

"You surprise me, but children do grow very fast. She had a strange name, but I cannot recall it."

"Her name is Patience, but nobody but her father calls her anything but Patty, which suits her much better."

"No, the name wasn't Patience, not the one I mean."

"The older sister is Waitstill, perhaps you mean her?"—and Ivory sat down by the fire with his book and his pipe.

"Waitstill! Waitstill! that is it! Such a beautiful name!"

"She's a beautiful girl."

"Waitstill! 'They also serve who only stand and wait.' 'Wait, I say, on the Lord and He will give thee the desires of thy heart.'—Those were wonderful days, when we were caught up out of the body and mingled freely in the spirit world." Mrs. Boynton was now fully started on the topic that absorbed her mind and Ivory could do nothing but let her tell the story that she had told him a hundred times.

"I remember when first we heard Jacob Cochrane speak." (This was her usual way of beginning.) "Your father was a preacher, as you know, Ivory, but you will never know what a wonderful preacher he was. My grandfather, being a fine gentleman, and a governor, would not give his consent to my marriage, but I never regretted it, never! Your father saw Elder Cochrane at a revival meeting of the Free Will Baptists in Scarboro', and was much impressed with him. A few days later we went to the funeral of a child in the same neighborhood. No one who was there could ever forget it. The minister had made his long prayer when a man suddenly entered the room, came towards the coffin, and placed his hand on the child's forehead. The room, in an instant, was as still as the death that had called us together. The stranger was tall and of commanding presence; his eyes pierced our very hearts, and his marvellous voice penetrated to depths in our souls that had never been reached before."

"Was he a better speaker than my father?" asked Ivory, who dreaded his mother's hours of complete silence even more than her periods of reminiscence.

"He spoke as if the Lord of Hosts had given him inspiration; as if the angels were pouring words into his mouth just for him to utter," replied Mrs. Boynton. "Your father was spell-bound, and I only less so. When he ceased speaking, the child's mother crossed the room, and swaying to and fro, fell at his feet, sobbing and wailing and imploring God to forgive her sins. They carried her upstairs, and when we looked about after the confusion and

excitement the stranger had vanished. But we found him again! As Elder Cochrane said: 'The prophet of the Lord can never be hid; no darkness is thick enough to cover him!' There was a six weeks' revival meeting in North Saco where three hundred souls were converted, and your father and I were among them. We had fancied ourselves true believers for years, but Jacob Cochrane unstopped our ears so that we could hear the truths revealed to him by the Almighty!—It was all so simple and easy at the beginning, but it grew hard and grievous afterward; hard to keep the path, I mean. I never quite knew whether God was angry with me for backsliding at the end, but I could not always accept the revelations that Elder Cochrane and your father had!"

Lois Boynton's hands were now quietly folded over the knitting that lay forgotten in her lap, but her low, thrilling voice had a note in it that did not belong wholly to earth.

There was a long silence; one of many long silences at the Boynton fireside, broken only by the ticking of the clock, the purring of the cat, and the clicking of Mrs. Boynton's needles, as, her paroxysm of reminiscence over, she knitted ceaselessly, with her eyes on the window or the door.

"It's about time for Rod to be coming back, isn't it?" asked Ivory.

"He ought to be here soon, but perhaps he is gone for good; it may be that he thinks he has made us a long enough visit. I don't know whether your father will like the boy when he comes home. He never did fancy company in the house."

Ivory looked up in astonishment from his Greek grammar. This was an entirely new turn of his mother's mind. Often when she was more than usually confused he would try to clear the cobwebs from her brain by gently questioning her until she brought herself back to a clearer understanding of her own thought. Thus far her vagaries had never made her unjust to any human creature; she was uniformly sweet and gentle in speech and demeanor.

"Why do you talk of Rod's visiting us when he is one of the family?" Ivory asked quietly.

"Is he one of the family? I didn't know it," replied his mother absently.

"Look at me, mother, straight in the eye; that's right: now listen, dear, to what I say."

Mrs. Boynton's hair that had been in her youth like an aureole of corn-silk was now a strange yellow-white, and her blue eyes looked out from her pale face with a helpless appeal.

"You and I were living alone here after father went away," Ivory began. "I was a little boy, you know. You and father had saved something, there was the farm, you worked like a slave, I helped, and we lived, somehow, do you remember?"

"I do, indeed! It was cold and the neighbors were cruel. Jacob Cochrane had gone away and his disciples were not always true to him. When the magnetism of his presence was withdrawn, they could not follow all his revelations, and they forgot how he had awakened their spiritual life at the first of his preaching. Your

father was always a stanch believer, but when he started on his mission and went to Parsonsfield to help Elder Cochrane in his meetings, the neighbors began to criticize him. They doubted him. You were too young to realize it, but I did, and it almost broke my heart."

"I was nearly twelve years old; do you think I escaped all the gossip, mother?"

"You never spoke of it to me, Ivory."

"No, there is much that I never spoke of to you, mother, but sometime when you grow stronger and your memory is better we will talk together.—Do you remember the winter, long after father went away, that Parson Lane sent me to Fairfield Academy to get enough Greek and Latin to make me a schoolmaster?"

"Yes," she answered uncertainly.

"Don't you remember I got a free ride down-river one Friday and came home for Sunday, just to surprise you? And when I got here I found you ill in bed, with Mrs. Mason and Dr. Perry taking care of you. You could not speak, you were so ill, but they told me you had been up in New Hampshire to see your sister, that she had died, and that you had brought back her boy, who was only four years old. That was Rod. I took him into bed with me that night, poor, homesick little fellow, and, as you know, mother, he's never left us since."

"I didn't remember I had a sister. Is she dead, Ivory?" asked Mrs. Boynton vaguely.

"If she were not dead, do you suppose you would have kept

Rodman with us when we hadn't bread enough for our own two mouths, mother?" questioned Ivory patiently.

"No, of course not. I can't think how I can be so forgetful. It's worse sometimes than others. It 's worse to-day because I knew the Mayflowers were blooming and that reminded me it was time for your father to come home; you must forgive me, dear, and will you excuse me if I sit in the kitchen awhile? The window by the side door looks out towards the road, and if I put a candle on the sill it shines quite a distance. The lane is such a long one, and your father was always a sad stumbler in the dark! I shouldn't like him to think I wasn't looking for him when he's been gone since January."

Ivory's pipe went out, and his book slipped from his knee unnoticed.

His mother was more confused than usual, but she always was when spring came to remind her of her husband's promise. Somehow, well used as he was to her mental wanderings, they made him uneasy to-night. His father had left home on a fancied mission, a duty he believed to be a revelation given by God through Jacob Cochrane. The farm did not miss him much at first, Ivory reflected bitterly, for since his fanatical espousal of Cochranism his father's interest in such mundane matters as household expenses had diminished month by month until they had no meaning for him at all. Letters to wife and boy had come at first, but after six months—during which he had written from many places, continually deferring the date of his return-

they had ceased altogether. The rest was silence. Rumors of his presence here or there came from time to time, but though Parson Lane and Dr. Perry did their best, none of them were ever substantiated.

Where had those years of wandering been passed, and had they all been given even to an imaginary and fantastic service of God? Was his father dead? If he were alive, what could keep him from writing? Nothing but a very strong reason, or a very wrong one, so his son thought, at times.

Since Ivory had grown to man's estate, he understood that in the later days of Cochrane's preaching, his "visions," "inspirations," and "revelations" concerning the marriage bond were a trifle startling from the old-fashioned, orthodox point of view. His most advanced disciples were to hold themselves in readiness to renounce their former vows and seek "spiritual consorts," sometimes according to his advice, sometimes as their inclinations prompted.

Had Aaron Boynton forsaken, willingly, the wife of his youth, the mother of his boy? If so, he must have realized to what straits he was subjecting them. Ivory had not forgotten those first few years of grinding poverty, anxiety, and suspense. His mother's mind had stood the strain bravely, but it gave way at last; not, however, until that fatal winter journey to New Hampshire, when cold, exposure, and fatigue did their worst for her weak body. Religious enthusiast, exalted and impressionable, a natural mystic, she had probably always been, far more so in

temperament, indeed, than her husband; but although she left home on that journey a frail and heartsick woman, she returned a different creature altogether, blurred and confused in mind, with clouded memory and irrational fancies.

She must have given up hope, just then, Ivory thought, and her love was so deep that when it was uprooted the soil came with it. Now hope had returned because the cruel memory had faded altogether. She sat by the kitchen window in gentle expectation, watching, always watching.

And this is the way many of Ivory Boynton's evenings were spent, while the heart of him, the five-and-twenty-year-old heart of him, was longing to feel the beat of another heart, a girl's heart only a mile or more away. The ice in Saco Water had broken up and the white blocks sailed majestically down towards the sea; sap was mounting and the elm trees were budding; the trailing arbutus was blossoming in the woods; the robins had come;- everything was announcing the spring, yet Ivory saw no changing seasons in his future; nothing but winter, eternal winter there!

V. PATIENCE AND IMPATIENCE

PATTY had been searching for eggs in the barn chamber, and coming down the ladder from the haymow spied her father washing the wagon by the well-side near the shed door. Cephas Cole kept store for him at meal hours and whenever trade was unusually brisk, and the Baxter yard was so happily situated that Old Foxy could watch both house and store.

There never was a good time to ask Deacon Baxter a favor, therefore this moment would serve as well as any other, so, approaching him near enough to be heard through the rubbing and splashing, but no nearer than was necessary Patty said:—

"Father, can I go up to Ellen Wilson's this afternoon and stay to tea? I won't start till I've done a good day's work and I'll come home early."

"What do you want to go gallivantin' to the neighbors for? I never saw anything like the girls nowadays; highty-tighty, flauntin', traipsin', triflin' trollops, ev'ry one of 'em, that's what they are, and Ellen Wilson's one of the triflin'est. You're old enough now to stay to home where you belong and make an effort to earn your board and clothes, which you can't, even if you try."

Spunk, real, Simon-pure spunk, started somewhere in Patty and coursed through her blood like wine.

"If a girl's old enough to stay at home and work, I should think she was old enough to go out and play once in a while." Patty

was still too timid to make this remark more than a courteous suggestion, so far as its tone was concerned.

"Don't answer me back; you're full of new tricks, and you've got to stop 'em, right where you are, or there'll be trouble. You were whistlin' just now up in the barn chamber; that's one of the things I won't have round my premises,—a whistlin' girl."

"'T was a Sabbath-School hymn that I was whistling!" This with a creditable imitation of defiance.

"That don't make it any better. Sing your hymns if you must make a noise while you're workin'."

"It's the same mouth that makes the whistle and sings the song, so I don't see why one's any wickeder than the other."

"You don't have to see," replied the Deacon grimly; "all you have to do is to mind when you're spoken to. Now run 'long 'bout your work."

"Can't I go up to Ellen's, then?"

"What's goin' on up there?"

"Just a frolic. There's always a good time at Ellen's, and I would so like the sight of a big, rich house now and then!"

"'Just a frolic.' Land o' Goshen, hear the girl! 'Sight of a big, rich house,' indeed!—Will there be any boys at the party?"

"I s'pose so, or 't wouldn't be a frolic," said Patty with awful daring; "but there won't be many; only a few of Mark's friends."

"Well, there ain't goin' to be no more argyfyin'! I won't have any girl o' mine frolickin' with boys, so that's the end of it. You're kind o' crazy lately, riggin' yourself out with a ribbon here and a

flower there, and pullin' your hair down over your ears. Why do you want to cover your ears up? What are they for?"

"To hear you with, father," Patty replied, with honey-sweet voice and eyes that blazed.

"Well, I hope they'll never hear anything worse," replied her father, flinging a bucket of water over the last of the wagon wheels.

"THEY COULDN'T!" These words were never spoken aloud, but oh! how Patty longed to shout them with a clarion voice as she walked away in perfect silence, her majestic gait showing, she hoped, how she resented the outcome of the interview.

"I've stood up to father!" she exclaimed triumphantly as she entered the kitchen and set down her yellow bowl of eggs on the table. "I stood up to him, and answered him back three times!"

Waitstill was busy with her Saturday morning cooking, but she turned in alarm.

"Patty, what have you said and done? Tell me quickly!"

"I 'argyfied,' but it didn't do any good; he won't let me go to Ellen's party."

Waitstill wiped her floury hands and put them on her sister's shoulders.

"Hear what I say, Patty: you must not argue with father, whatever he says. We don't love him and so there isn't the right respect in our hearts, but at least there can be respect in our manners."

"I don't believe I can go on for years, holding in, Waitstill!"

Patty whimpered.

"Yes, you can. I have!"

"You're different, Waitstill."

"I wasn't so different at sixteen, but that's five years ago, and I've got control of my tongue and my temper since then. Sometime, perhaps, when I have a grievance too great to be rightly borne, sometime when you are away from here in a home of your own, I shall speak out to father; just empty my heart of all the disappointment and bitterness and rebellion. Somebody ought to tell him the truth, and perhaps it will be me!"

"I wish it could be me," exclaimed Patty vindictively, and with an equal disregard of grammar.

"You would speak in temper, I'm afraid, Patty, and that would spoil all. I'm sorry you can't go up to Ellen's," she sighed, turning back to her work; "you don't have pleasure enough for one of your age; still, don't fret; something may happen to change things, and anyhow the weather is growing warmer, and you and I have so many more outings in summer-time. Smooth down your hair, child; there are straws in it, and it's all rough with the wind. I don't like flying hair about a kitchen."

"I wish my hair was flying somewhere a thousand miles from here; or at least I should wish it if it did not mean leaving you; for oh. I'm so miserable and disappointed and unhappy!"

Waitstill bent over the girl as she flung herself down beside the table and smoothed her shoulder gently.

"There, there, dear; it isn't like my gay little sister to cry. What

is the matter with you to-day, Patty?"

"I suppose it's the spring," she said, wiping her eyes with her apron and smiling through her tears. "Perhaps I need a dose of sulphur and molasses."

"Don't you feel well as common?"

"Well? I feel too well! I feel as if I was a young colt shut up in an attic. I want to kick up my heels, batter the door down, and get out into the pasture. It's no use talking, Waity;—I can't go on living without a bit of pleasure and I can't go on being patient even for your sake. If it weren't for you, I'd run away as Job did; and I never believed Moses slipped on the logs; I'm sure he threw himself into the river, and so should I if I had the courage!"

"Stop, Patty, stop, dear! You shall have your bit of pasture, at least. I'll do some of your indoor tasks for you, and you shall put on your sunbonnet and go out and dig the dandelion greens for dinner. Take the broken knife and a milkpan and don't bring in so much earth with them as you did last time. Dry your eyes and look at the green things growing. Remember how young you are and how many years are ahead of you! Go along, dear!"

Waitstill went about her work with rather a heavy heart. Was life going to be more rather than less difficult, now that Patty was growing up? Would she he able to do her duty both by father and sister and keep peace in the household, as she had vowed, in her secret heart, always to do? She paused every now and then to look out of the window and wave an encouraging hand to Patty. The girl's bonnet was off, and her uncovered head blazed

like red gold in the sunlight. The short young grass was dotted with dandelion blooms, some of them already grown to huge disks of yellow, and Patty moved hither and thither, selecting the younger weeds, deftly putting the broken knife under their roots and popping them into the tin pan. Presently, for Deacon Baxter had finished the wagon and gone down the hill to relieve Cephas Cole at the counter, Patty's shrill young whistle floated into the kitchen, but with a mischievous glance at the open window she broke off suddenly and began to sing the words of the hymn with rather more emphasis and gusto than strict piety warranted.

"There'll be SOMEthing in heav-en for chil-dren to do,
None are idle in that bless-ed land:
There'll be WORK for the heart. There'll be WORK for the mind,
And emPLOYment for EACH little hand.
"There'll be SOME-thing to do,
There'll be SOME-thing to do,
There'll be SOME-thing for CHIL-dren to do!
On that bright blessed shore where there's joy evermore,
There'll be SOME-thing for CHIL-DREN to do."

Patty's young existence being full to the brim of labor, this view of heaven never in the least appealed to her and she rendered the hymn with little sympathy. The main part of the verse was strongly accented by jabs at the unoffending dandelion roots, but when the chorus came she brought out the emphatic syllables by

a beat of the broken knife on the milkpan.

This rendition of a Sabbath-School classic did not meet Waitstill's ideas of perfect propriety, but she smiled and let it pass, planning some sort of recreation for a stolen half-hour of the afternoon. It would have to be a walk through the pasture into the woods to see what had grown since they went there a fortnight ago. Patty loved people better than Nature, but failing the one she could put up with the other, for she had a sense of beauty and a pagan love of color. There would be pale-hued innocence and blue and white violets in the moist places, thought Waitstill, and they would have them in a china cup on the supper-table. No, that would never do, for last time father had knocked them over when he was reaching for the bread, and in a silent protest against such foolishness got up from the table and emptied theirs into the kitchen sink.

"There's a place for everything," he said when he came back, "and the place for flowers is outdoors."

Then in the pine woods there would be, she was sure, Star of Bethlehem, Solomon's Seal, the white spray of groundnuts and bunchberries. Perhaps they could make a bouquet and Patty would take it across the fields to Mrs. Boynton's door. She need not go in, and thus they would not be disobeying their father's command not to visit that "crazy Boynton woman."

Here Patty came in with a pan full of greens and the sisters sat down in the sunny window to get them ready for the pot.

"I'm calmer," the little rebel allowed. "That's generally the way

it turns out with me. I get into a rage, but I can generally sing it off!"

"You certainly must have got rid of a good deal of temper this morning, by the way your voice sounded."

"Nobody can hear us in this out-of-the-way place. It's easy enough to see that the women weren't asked to say anything when the men settled where the houses should be built! The men weren't content to stick them on the top of a high hill, or half a mile from the stores, but put them back to the main road, taking due care to cut the sink-window where their wives couldn't see anything even when they were washing dishes."

"I don't know that I ever thought about it in that way"; and Waitstill looked out of the window in a brown study while her hands worked with the dandelion greens. "I've noticed it, but I never supposed the men did it intentionally."

"No, you wouldn't," said Patty with the pessimism of a woman of ninety, as she stole an admiring glance at her sister. Patty's own face, irregular, piquant, tantalizing, had its peculiar charm, and her brilliant skin and hair so dazzled the masculine beholder that he took note of no small defects; but Waitstill was beautiful; beautiful even in her working dress of purple calico. Her single braid of hair, the Foxwell hair, that in her was bronze and in Patty pale auburn, was wound once around her fine head and made to stand a little as it went across the front. It was a simple, easy, unconscious fashion of her own, quite different from anything done by other women in her time and place, and it just suited

her dignity and serenity. It looked like a coronet, but it was the way she carried her head that gave you the fancy, there was such spirit and pride in the poise of it on the long graceful neck. Her eyes were as clear as mountain pools shaded by rushes, and the strength of the face was softened by the sweetness of the mouth.

Patty never let the conversation die out for many seconds at a time and now she began again. "My sudden rages don't match my name very well, but, of course, mother didn't know how I was going to turn out when she called me Patience, for I was nothing but a squirming little bald, red baby; but my name really is too ridiculous when you think about it."

Waitstill laughed as she said: "It didn't take you long to change it! Perhaps Patience was a hard word for a baby to say, but the moment you could talk you said, 'Patty wants this' and 'Patty wants that.'"

"Did Patty ever get it? She never has since, that's certain! And look at your name: it's 'Waitstill,' yet you never stop a moment. When you're not in the shed or barn, or chicken-house, or kitchen or attic, or garden-patch, you are working in the Sunday School or the choir."

It seemed as if Waitstill did not intend to answer this arraignment of her activities. She rose and crossed the room to put the pan of greens in the sink, preparing to wash them.

Taking the long-handled dipper from the nail, she paused a moment before plunging it into the water pail; paused, and leaning her elbow on a corner of the shelf over the sink, looked

steadfastly out into the orchard.

Patty watched her curiously and was just going to offer a penny for her thoughts when Waitstill suddenly broke the brief silence by saying: “Yes, I am always busy; it’s better so, but all the same, Patty, I’m waiting,—inside! I don’t know for what, but I always feel that I am waiting!”

VI. A KISS

"SHALL we have our walk in the woods on the Edgewood side of the river, just for a change, Patty?" suggested her sister. "The water is so high this year that the river will be splendid. We can gather our flowers in the hill pasture and then you'll be quite near Mrs. Boynton's and can carry the nosegay there while I come home ahead of you and get supper. I'll take to-day's eggs to father's store on the way and ask him if he minds our having a little walk. I've an errand at Aunt Abby's that would take me down to the bridge anyway."

"Very well," said Patty, somewhat apathetically. "I always like a walk with you, but I don't care what becomes of me this afternoon if I can't go to Ellen's party."

The excursion took place according to Waitstill's plan, and at four o'clock she sped back to her night work and preparations for supper, leaving Patty with a great bunch of early wildflowers for Ivory's mother. Patty had left them at the Boyntons' door with Rodman, who was picking up chips and volunteered to take the nosegay into the house at once.

"Won't you step inside?" the boy asked shyly, wishing to be polite, but conscious that visitors, from the village very seldom crossed the threshold.

"I'd like to, but I can't this afternoon, thank you. I must run all the way down the hill now, or I shan't be in time to supper."

"Do you eat meals together over to your house?" asked the boy.

"We're all three at the table if that means together."

"We never are. Ivory goes off early and takes lunch in a pail. So do I when I go to school. Aunt Boynton never sits down to eat; she just stands at the window and takes a bite of something now 'and then. You haven't got any mother, have you?"

"No, Rodman."

"Neither have I, nor any father, nor any relations but Aunt Boynton and Ivory. Ivory is very good to me, and when he's at home I'm never lonesome."

"I wish you could come over and eat with sister and me," said Patty gently. "Perhaps sometime, when my father is away buying goods and we are left alone, you could join us in the woods, and we would have a picnic? We would bring enough for you; all sorts of good things; hard-boiled eggs, doughnuts, apple-turnovers, and bread spread with jelly."

"I'd like it fine!" exclaimed Rodman, his big dark eyes sparkling with anticipation. "I don't have many boys to play with, and I never went to a picnic Aunt Boynton watches for uncle '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 back-gammon 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 anywheres, 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 every-wheres 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 good-bye; 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 lapwing over the high-road.

"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 Waity, though, and then perhaps I couldn't get him, anyway.... If I couldn't, he'd be the only one! I've 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 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. Wait-still always asks father for me, but I wouldn't take any chances to-day, 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, unaccustomed 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 buggies "courtin' 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 tabbies up and start 'em talking, shall we?" Mark suggested. "I'll give you the reins and let Nero have a flick 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, a gratified vanity swam over her in turn.

A few minutes later she heard once more the rumble of wheels on the road. It was Cephas Cole driving towards 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 supper-horn jest as I come over the bridge," remarked Cephas, drawing up in the road. "He stood in the door-yard blowin' like Bedlam. I guess you 're late to supper."

"I'll be home in a few minutes," said Patty, "I got delayed and am a little behindhand."

"I'll turn right round if you'll git in and lemme take you back-along a piece; it'll save you a good five minutes," begged Cephas, abjectly.

"All right; much obliged; but it's against the rules and you must drop me at the foot of our hill and let me walk up."

"Certain; I know the Deacon 'n' I ain't huntin' for trouble any more'n you be; though I 'd take it quick enough if you jest give me leave! I ain't no coward an' I could tackle the Deacon to-morrow if so be I had anything to ask him."

This seemed to Patty a line of conversation distinctly to be discouraged under all the circumstances, and she tried to keep Cephas on the subject of his daily tasks and his mother's rheumatism until she could escape from his over-appreciative society.

"How do you like my last job?" he inquired as they passed his father's house. "Some think I've got the ell a little mite too yaller.

Folks that ain't never handled a brush allers think they can mix paint better 'n them that knows their trade."

"If your object was to have everybody see the ell a mile away, you've succeeded," said Patty cruelly. She never flung the poor boy a civil word for fear of getting something warmer than civility in return.

"It'll tone down," Cephas responded, rather crestfallen. "I wanted a good bright lastin' shade. 'T won't look so yaller when father lets me paint the house to match, but that won't be till next year. He makes fun of the yaller color same as you; says a home's something you want to forget when you're away from it. Mother says the two rooms of the ell are big enough for somebody to set up housekeepin' in. What do you think?"

"I never think," returned Patty with a tantalizing laugh. "Good-night, Cephas; thank you for giving me a lift!"

VII. "WHAT DREAMS MAY COME"

SUPPER was over and the work done at last; the dishes washed, the beans put in soak, the hens shut up for the night, the milk strained and carried down cellar. Patty went up to her little room with the one window and the slanting walls and Waitstill followed and said good-night. Her father put out the lights, locked the doors, and came up the creaking stairs. There was never any talk between the sisters before going to bed, save on nights when their father was late at the store, usually on Saturdays only, for the good talkers of the village, as well as the gossips and loafers, preferred any other place to swap stories than the bleak atmosphere provided by old Foxy at his place of business.

Patty could think in the dark; her healthy young body lying not uncomfortably on the bed of corn husks, and the patchwork comforter drawn up under her chin. She could think, but for the first time she could not tell her thoughts to Waitstill. She had a secret; a dazzling secret, just like Ellen Wilson and some of the other girls who were several years older. Her afternoon's experience loomed as large in her innocent mind as if it had been an elopement.

"I hope I'm not engaged to be married to him, EVEN IF HE DID—" The sentence was too tremendous to be finished, even in thought. "I don't think I can be; men must surely say something,

and not take it for granted you are in love with them and want to marry them. It is what they say when they ask that I should like much better than being married, when I'm only just past seventeen. I wish Mark was a little different; I don't like his careless ways! He admires me, I can tell one; that by the way he looks, but he admires himself just as much, and expects me to do the same; still, I suppose none of them are perfect, and girls have to forgive lots of little things when they are engaged. Mother must have forgiven a good many things when she took father. Anyway, Mark is going away for a month on business, so I shan't have to make up my mind just yet!" Here sleep descended upon the slightly puzzled, but on the whole delightfully complacent, little creature, bringing her most alluring and untrustworthy dreams.

The dear innocent had, indeed, no need of haste! Young Mr. Marquis de Lafayette Wilson, Mark for short, was not in the least a gay deceiver or ruthless breaker of hearts, and, so far as known, no scalps of village beauties were hung to his belt. He was a likable, light-weight young chap, as indolent and pleasure-loving as the strict customs of the community would permit; and a kiss, in his mind, most certainly never would lead to the altar, else he had already been many times a bridegroom. Miss Patience Baxter's maiden meditations and uncertainties and perplexities, therefore, were decidedly premature. She was a natural-born, unconsciously artistic, highly expert, and finished coquette. She was all this at seventeen, and Mark at twenty-four

was by no means a match for her in this field of effort, yet!—but sometimes, in getting her victim into the net, the coquette loses her balance and falls in herself. There wasn't a bit of harm in Marquis de Lafayette, but he was extremely agile in keeping out of nets!

Waitstill was restless, too, that night, although she could not have told the reason. She opened her window at the back of the house and leaned out. The evening was mild with a soft wind blowing. She could hear the full brook dashing through the edge of the wood-lot, and even the "ker-chug" of an occasional bull-frog. There were great misty stars in the sky, but no moon.

There was no light in Aunt Abby Cole's kitchen, but a faint glimmer shone through the windows of Uncle Bart's joiner's shop, showing that the old man was either having an hour of peaceful contemplation with no companion but his pipe, or that there might be a little group of privileged visitors, headed by Jed Morrill, busily discussing the affairs of the nation.

Waitstill felt troubled and anxious to-night; bruised by the little daily torments that lessened her courage but never wholly destroyed it. Any one who believed implicitly in heredity might have been puzzled, perhaps, to account for her. He might fantastically picture her as making herself out of her ancestors, using a free hand, picking and choosing what she liked best, with due care for the effect of combinations; selecting here and there and modifying, if advisable, a trait of Grandpa or Grandma Foxwell, of Great-Uncle or Great-Aunt Baxter;

borrowing qualities lavishly from her own gently born and gently bred mother, and carefully avoiding her respected father's Stock, except, perhaps, to take a dash of his pluck and an ounce of his persistence. Jed Morrill remarked of Deacon Baxter once: "When Old Foxy wants anything he'll wait till hell freezes over afore he'll give up." Waitstill had her father's firm chin, but there the likeness ended. The proud curve of her nostrils, the clear well-opened eye with its deep fringe of lashes, the earnest mouth, all these came from the mother who was little more than a dim memory.

Waitstill disdained any vague, dreary, colorless theory of life and its meaning. She had joined the church at fifteen, more or less because other girls did and the parson had persuaded her; but out of her hard life she had somehow framed a courageous philosophy that kept her erect and uncrushed, no matter how great her difficulties. She had no idea of bringing a poor, weak, draggled soul to her Maker at the last day, saying "Here is all I have managed to save out of what you gave me!" That would be something, she allowed, immeasurably something; but pitiful compared with what she might do if she could keep a brave, vigorous spirit and march to the last tribunal strengthened by battles, struggles, defeats, victories; by the defense of weaker human creatures, above all, warmed and vitalized by the pouring out and gathering in of love.

Patty slept sweetly on the other side of the partition, the contemplation of her twopenny triumphs bringing a smile to her

childish lips: but even so a good heart was there (still perhaps in the process of making), a quick wit, ready sympathy, natural charm; plenty, indeed, for the stronger sister to cherish, protect, and hold precious, as she did, with all her mind and soul.

There had always been a passionate loyalty in Waitstill's affection, wherever it had been bestowed. Uncle Bart delighted in telling an instance of it that occurred when she was a child of five. Maine had just separated amicably from her mother, Massachusetts, and become an independent state. It was in the middle of March, but there was no snow on the ground and the village boys had built a bonfire on a plot of land near Uncle Bart's joiner's shop. There was a large gathering in celebration of the historic event and Waitstill crept down the hill with her homemade rag doll in her arms. She stood on the outskirts of the crowd, a silent, absorbed little figure clad in a shabby woollen coat, with a blue knit hood framing her rosy face. Deborah, her beloved, her only doll, was tightly clasped in her arms, for Debby, like her parent, had few pleasures and must not be denied so great a one as this. Suddenly, one of the thoughtless young scamps in the group, wishing to create a new sensation and add to the general excitement, caught the doll from the child's arms, and running forward with a loud war-whoop, flung it into the flames. Waitstill did not lose an instant. She gave a scream Of anguish, and without giving any warning of her intentions, probably without realizing them herself, she dashed through the little crowd into the bonfire and snatched her cherished offspring

from the burning pile. The whole thing was over in the twinkling of an eye, for Uncle Bart was as quick as the child and dragged her out of the imminent danger with no worse harm done than a good scorching.

He led the little creature up the hill to explain matters and protect her from a scolding. She still held the doll against her heaving breast, saying, between her sobs: "I couldn't let my Debby burn up! I couldn't, Uncle Bart; she's got nobody but me! Is my dress scorched so much I can't wear it? You'll tell father how it was, Uncle Bart, won't you?"

Debby bore the marks of her adventure longer than her owner, for she had been longer in the fire, but, stained and defaced as she was, she was never replaced, and remained the only doll of Waitstill's childhood. At this very moment she lay softly and safely in a bureau drawer ready to be lifted out, sometime, Waitstill fancied, and shown tenderly to Patty's children. Of her own possible children she never thought. There was but one man in the world who could ever be the father of them and she was separated from him by every obstacle that could divide two human beings.

SUMMER

VIII. THE JOINER'S SHOP

VILLAGE "Aunts" and "Uncles" were elected to that relationship by the common consent of the community; their fitness being established by great age, by decided individuality or eccentricity of character, by uncommon lovableness, or by the possession of an abundant wit and humor. There was no formality about the thing; certain women were always called "Aunt Sukie," or "Aunt Hitty," or what not, while certain men were distinguished as "Uncle Rish," or "Uncle Pel," without previous arrangement, or the consent of the high contracting parties.

Such a couple were Cephas Cole's father and mother, Aunt Abby and Uncle Bart. Bartholomew Cole's trade was that of a joiner; as for Aunt Abby's, it can only be said that she made all trades her own by sovereign right of investigation, and what she did not know about her neighbor's occupations was unlikely to be discovered on this side of Jordan. One of the villagers declared that Aunt Abby and her neighbor, Mrs. Abel Day, had argued for an hour before they could make a bargain about the method of disseminating a certain important piece of news, theirs by exclusive right of discovery and prior possession. Mrs.

Day offered to give Mrs. Cole the privilege of Saco Hill and Aunt Betty-Jack's, she herself to take Guide-Board and Town-House Hills. Aunt Abby quickly proved the injustice of this decision, saying that there were twice as many families living in Mrs. Day's chosen territory as there were in that allotted to her, so the river road to Milliken's Mills was grudgingly awarded to Aunt Abby by way of compromise, and the ladies started on what was a tour of mercy in those days, the furnishing of a subject of discussion for long, quiet evenings.

Uncle Bart's joiner's shop was at the foot of Guide-Board Hill on the Riverboro side of the bridge, and it was the pleasantest spot in the whole village. The shop itself had a cheery look, with its weather-stained shingles, its small square windows, and its hospitable door, half as big as the front side of the building. The step was an old millstone too worn for active service, and the piles of chips and shavings on each side of it had been there for so many years that sweet-williams, clove pinks, and purple phlox were growing in among them in the most irresponsible fashion; while a morning-glory vine had crept up and curled around a long-handled rake that had been standing against the front of the house since early spring. There was an air of cosy and amiable disorder about the place that would have invited friendly confabulation even had not Uncle Bart's white head, honest, ruddy face, and smiling welcome coaxed you in before you were aware. A fine Nodhead apple tree shaded the side windows, and underneath it reposed all summer a bright blue

sleigh, for Uncle Bart always described himself as being "plagued for shed room" and kept things as he liked at the shop, having a "p'ison neat" wife who did exactly the opposite at his house.

The seat of the sleigh was all white now with scattered fruit blossoms, and one of Waitstill's earliest remembrances was of going downhill with Patty toddling at her side; of Uncle Bart's lifting them into the sleigh and permitting them to sit there and eat the ripe red apples that had fallen from the tree. Uncle Bart's son, Cephas (Patty's secret adorer), was a painter by trade, and kept his pots and cans and brushes in a little outhouse at the back, while Uncle Bart himself stood every day behind his long joiner's bench almost knee-deep in shavings. How the children loved to play with the white, satiny rings, making them into necklaces, hanging them to their ears and weaving them into wreaths.

Wonderful houses could always be built in the corner of the shop, out of the little odds and ends and "nubbins" of white pine, and Uncle Bart was ever ready to cut or saw a special piece needed for some great purpose.

The sound of the plane was sweet music in the old joiner's ears. "I don't hardly know how I'd a made out if I'd had to work in a mill," he said confidentially to Cephas. "The noise of a saw goin' all day, coupled with your mother's tongue mornin's an' evenin's, would 'a' been too much for my weak head. I'm a quiet man, Cephas, a man that needs a peaceful shop where he can get away from the comforts of home now and then, without shirkin' his duty nor causin' gossip. If you should ever marry, Cephas,

—which don't look to me likely without you pick out a dif'rent girl,—I 'd advise you not to keep your stock o' paints in the barn or the shed, for it's altogether too handy to the house and the women-folks. Take my advice and have a place to yourself, even if it's a small one. A shop or a barn has saved many a man's life and reason Cephas, for it's ag'in' a woman's nature to have you underfoot in the house without hectorin' you. Choose a girl same's you would a horse that you want to hitch up into a span; 't ain't every two that'll stan' together without kickin'. When you get the right girl, keep out of her way consid'able an' there'll be less wear an' tear."

It was June and the countryside was so beautiful it seemed as if no one could be unhappy, however great the cause. That was what Waitstill Baxter thought as she sat down on the millstone step for a word with the old joiner, her best and most understanding friend in all the village.

"I've come to do my mending here with you," she said brightly, as she took out her well-filled basket and threaded her needle. "Isn't it a wonderful morning? Nobody could look the world in the face and do a wrong thing on such a day, could they, Uncle Bart?"

The meadows were a waving mass of golden buttercups; the shallow water at the river's edge just below the shop was blue with spikes of arrow-weed; a bunch of fragrant water-lilies, gathered from the mill-pond's upper levels, lay beside Waitstill's mending-basket, and every foot of roadside and field within sight was

swaying with long-stemmed white and gold daisies. The June grass, the friendly, humble, companionable grass, that no one ever praises as they do the flowers, was a rich emerald green, a velvet carpet fit for the feet of the angels themselves. And the elms and maples! Was there ever such a year for richness of foliage? And the sky, was it ever so blue or so clear, so far away, or so completely like heaven, as you looked at its reflection in the glassy surface of the river?

"Yes, it's a pretty good day," allowed Uncle Bart judicially as he took a squint at his T-square. "I don' know's I should want to start out an' try to beat it! The Lord can make a good many kinds o' weather in the course of a year, but when He puts his mind on to it, an' kind o' gives Himself a free hand, He can turn out a June morning that must make the Devil sick to his stomach with envy! All the same, Waity, my cow ain't behavin' herself any better'n usual. She's been rampagin' since sun-up. I've seen mother chasin' her out o' Mis' Day's garden-patch twice a'ready! —It seems real good an' homey to see you settin' there sewin' while I'm workin' at the bench. Cephas is down to the store, so I s'pose your father's off somewheres?"

Perhaps the June grass was a little greener, the buttercups yellower, the foliage more lacey, the sky bluer, because Deacon Baxter had taken his luncheon in a pail under the wagon seat, and departed on an unwilling journey to Moderation, his object being to press the collection of some accounts too long overdue. There was something tragic in the fact, Waitstill thought, that

whenever her father left the village for a whole day, life at once grew brighter, easier, more hopeful. One could breathe freely, speak one's heart out, believe in the future, when father was away.

The girls had harbored many delightful plans at early breakfast. As it was Saturday, Patty could catch little Rod Boynton, if he came to the bridge on errands as usual; and if Ivory could spare him for an hour at noon they would take their luncheon and eat it together on the river-bank as Patty had promised him. At the last moment, however, Deacon Baxter had turned around in the wagon and said: "Patience, you go down to the store and have a regular house-cleanin' in the stock-room. Git Cephas to lift what you can't lift yourself, move everything in the place, sweep and dust it, scrub the floor, wash the winder, and make room for the new stuff that they'll bring up from Mill-town 'bout noon. If you have any time left over, put new papers on the shelves out front, and clean up and fix the show winder. Don't stand round gabbin' with Cephas, and see't he don't waste time that's paid for by me. Tell him he might clean up the terbaccer stains round the stove, black it, and cover it up for the summer if he ain't too busy servin' cust'mers."

"The whole day spoiled!" wailed Patty, flinging herself down in the kitchen rocker. "Father's powers of invention beat anything I ever saw! That stock-room could have been cleaned any time this month and it's too heavy work for me anyway; it spoils my hands, grubbing around those nasty, sticky, splintery boxes and barrels. Instead of being out of doors, I've got to be shut up

in that smelly, rummy, tobacco-y, salt-fishy, pepperminty place with Cephas Cole! He won't have a pleasant morning, I can tell you! I shall snap his head off every time he speaks to me."

"So I would!" Waitstill answered composedly. "Everything is so clearly his fault that I certainly would work off my temper on Cephas! Still, I can think of a way to make matters come out right. I've got a great basket of mending that must be done, and you remember there's a choir rehearsal for the new anthem this afternoon, but anyway I can help a little on the cleaning. Then you can make Rodman do a few of the odd jobs, it will be a novelty to him; and Cephas will work his fingers to the bone for you, as you well know, if you treat him like a human being."

"All right!" cried Patty joyously, her mood changing in an instant. "There's Rod coming over the bridge now! Toss me my gingham apron and the scrubbing-brush, and the pail, and the tin of soft soap, and the cleaning cloths; let's see, the broom's down there, so I've got everything. If I wave a towel from the store, pack up luncheon for three. You come down and bring your mending; then, when you see how I'm getting on, we can consult. I'm going to take the ten cents I've saved and spend it in raisins. I can get a good many if Cephas gives me wholesale price, with family discount subtracted from that. Cephas would treat me to candy in a minute, but if I let him we'd have to ask him to the picnic! Good-bye!" And the volatile creature darted down the hill singing, "There'll be something in heaven for children to do," at the top of her healthy young lungs.

IX. CEPHAS SPEAKS

THE waving signal, a little later on, showed that Rodman could go to the picnic, the fact being that he was having a holiday from eleven o'clock until two, and Ivory was going to drive to the bridge at noon, anyway, so his permission could then be asked.

Patty's mind might have been thought entirely on her ugly task as she swept and dusted and scrubbed that morning, but the reverse was true. Mark Wilson had gone away without saying good-bye to her. This was not surprising, perhaps, as she was about as much sequestered in her hilltop prison as a Turkish beauty in a harem; neither was it astonishing that Mark did not write to her. He never had written to her, and as her father always brought home the very infrequent letters that came to the family, Mark knew that any sentimental correspondence would be fraught with danger. No, everything was probably just as it should be, and yet,—well, Patty had expected during the last three weeks that something would happen to break up the monotony of her former existence. She hardly knew what it would be, but the kiss dropped so lightly on her cheek by Mark Wilson still burned in remembrance, and made her sure that it would have a sequel, or an explanation.

Mark's sister Ellen and Phil Perry were in the midst of some form of lover's quarrel, and during its progress Phil was paying considerable attention to Patty at Sabbath School and prayer-

meeting, occasions, it must be confessed, only provocative of very indirect and long-distance advances. Cephas Cole, to the amazement of every one but his (constitutionally) exasperated mother, was "toning down" the ell of the family mansion, mitigating the lively yellow, and putting another fresh coat of paint on it, for no conceivable reason save that of pleasing the eye of a certain capricious, ungrateful young hussy, who would probably say, when her verdict was asked, that she didn't see any particular difference in it, one way or another.

Trade was not especially brisk at the Deacon's emporium this sunny June Saturday morning. Cephas may have possibly lost a customer or two by leaving the store vacant while he toiled and sweated for Miss Patience Baxter in the stockroom at the back, overhanging the river, but no man alive could see his employer's lovely daughter tugging at a keg of shingle nails without trying to save her from a broken back, although Cephas could have watched his mother move the house and barn without feeling the slightest anxiety in her behalf. If he could ever get the "heft" of the "doggoned" cleaning out of the way so that Patty's mind could be free to entertain his proposition; could ever secure one precious moment of silence when she was not slatting and banging, pushing and pulling things about, her head and ears out of sight under a shelf, and an irritating air of absorption about her whole demeanor; if that moment of silence could ever, under Providence, be simultaneous with the absence of customers in the front shop, Cephas intended to offer himself to Patience

Baxter that very morning.

Once, during a temporary lull in the rear, he started to meet his fate when Rodman Boynton followed him into the back room, and the boy was at once set to work by Patty, who was the most consummate slave-driver in the State of Maine. After half an hour there was another Heavensent chance, when Rodman went up to Uncle Bart's shop with a message for Waitstill, but, just then, in came Bill Morrill, a boy of twelve, with a request for a gallon of molasses; and would Cephas lend him a stone jug over Sunday, for his mother had hers soakin' out in soap-suds 'cause 't wa'n't smellin' jest right. Bill's message given, he hurried up the road on another errand, promising to call for the molasses later.

Cephas put the gallon measure under the spigot of the molasses hogshead and turned on the tap. The task was going to be a long one and he grew impatient, for the stream was only a slender trickle, scarcely more than the slow dripping of drops, so the molasses must be very never low, and with his mind full of weightier affairs he must make a note to tell the Deacon to broach a new hogshead. Cephas feared that he could never make out a full gallon, in which case Mrs. Morrill would be vexed, for she kept mill boarders and baked quantities of brown bread and gingerbread and molasses cookies for over Sunday. He did wish trade would languish altogether on this particular morning. The minutes dragged by and again there was perfect quiet in the stock-room. As the door opened, Cephas, taking his last chance, went forward to meet Patty, who was turning down the skirt of

her dress, taking the cloth off her head, smoothing her hair, and tying on a clean white ruffed apron, in which she looked as pretty as a pink.

"Patty!" stammered Cephas, seizing his golden opportunity, "Patty, keep your mind on me for a minute. I've put a new coat o' paint on the ell just to please you; won't you get married and settle down with me? I love you so I can't eat nor drink nor 'tend store nor nothin'!"

"Oh, I—I—couldn't, Cephas, thank you; I just couldn't,—don't ask me," cried Patty, as nervous as Cephas himself now that her first offer had really come; "I'm only seventeen and I don't feel like settling down, Cephas, and father wouldn't think of letting me get married."

"Don't play tricks on me, Patty, and keep shovin' me off so, an' givin' wrong reasons," pleaded Cephas. "What's the trouble with me? I know mother's temper's onsartain, but we never need go into the main house daytimes and father'd allers stand up ag'in' her if she didn't treat you right. I've got a good trade and father has a hundred dollars o' my savin's that I can draw out to-morrer if you'll have me."

"I can't, Cephas; don't move; stay where you are; no, don't come any nearer; I'm not fond of you that way, and, besides,—and, besides—"

Her blush and her evident embarrassment gave Cephas a new fear.

"You ain't promised a'ready, be you?" he asked anxiously;

"when there ain't a feller anywheres around that's ever stepped foot over your father's doorsill but jest me?"

"I haven't promised anything or anybody,"

Patty answered sedately, gaining her self-control by degrees, "but I won't deny that I'm considering; that's true!"

"Considerin' who?" asked Cephas, turning pale.

"Oh,—SEVERAL, if you must know the truth"; and Patty's tone was cruel in its jauntiness.

"SEVERAL!" The word did not sound like ordinary work-a-day Riverboro English in Cephas's ears. He knew that "several" meant more than one, but he was too stunned to define the term properly in its present strange connection.

"Whoever 't is wouldn't do any better by you'n I would. I'd take a lickin' for you any day," Cephas exclaimed abjectly, after a long pause.

"That wouldn't make any difference, Cephas," said Patty firmly, moving towards the front door as if to end the interview. "If I don't love you UNlicked, I couldn't love you any better licked, now, could I?—Goodness gracious, what am I stepping in? Cephas, quick! Something has been running all over the floor. My feet are sticking to it."

"Good Gosh! It's Mis' Morrill's molasses!" cried Cephas, brought to his senses suddenly.

It was too true! Whatever had been the small obstruction in the tap, it had disappeared. The gallon measure had been filled to the brim ten minutes before, and ever since, the treacly liquid

had been overflowing the top and spreading in a brown flood, unnoticed, over the floor. Patty's feet were glued to it, her buff calico skirts lifted high to escape harm.

"I can't move," she cried. "Oh! You stupid, stupid Cephas, how could you leave the molasses spigot turned on? See what you've done! You've wasted quarts and quarts! What will father say, and how will you ever clean up such a mess? You never can get the floor to look so that he won't notice it, and he is sure to miss the molasses. You've ruined my shoes, and I simply can't bear the sight of you!"

At this Cephas all but blubbered in the agony of his soul. It was bad enough to be told by Patty that she was "considering several," but his first romance had ended in such complete disaster that he saw in a vision his life blasted; changed in one brief moment from that of a prosperous young painter to that of a blighted and despised bungler, whose week's wages were likely to be expended in molasses to make good the Deacon's loss.

"Find those cleaning-cloths I left in the hack room," ordered Patty with a flashing eye. "Get some blocks, or bits of board, or stones, for me to walk on, so that I can get out of your nasty mess. Fill Bill Morrill's jug, quick, and set it out on the steps for him to pick up. I don't know what you'd do without me to plan for you! Lock the front door and hang father's sign that he's gone to dinner on the doorknob. Scoop up all the molasses you can with one of those new trowels on the counter. Scoop, and scrape, and scoop, and scrape; then put a cloth on your oldest broom,

pour lots of water on, pail after pail, and swab! When you've swabbed till it won't do any more good, then scrub! After that, I shouldn't wonder if you had to fan the floor with a newspaper or it'll never get dry before father comes home. I'll sit on the flour barrel a little while and advise, but I can't stay long because I'm going to a picnic. Hurry up and don't look as if you were going to die any minute! It's no use crying over spilt molasses. You don't suppose I'm going to tell any tales after you've made me an offer of marriage, do you? I'm not so mean as all that, though I may have my faults."

It was nearly two o'clock before the card announcing Deacon Baxter's absence at dinner was removed from the front doorknob, and when the store was finally reopened for business it was a most dejected clerk who dealt out groceries to the public. The worst feature of the affair was that every one in the two villages suddenly and contemporaneously wanted molasses, so that Cephas spent the afternoon reviewing his misery by continually turning the tap and drawing off the fatal liquid. Then, too, every inquisitive boy in the neighborhood came to the back of the store to view the operation, exclaiming: "What makes the floor so wet? Hain't been spillin' molasses, have yer? Bet yer have! Good joke on Old Foxy!"

X. ON TORY HILL

It had been a heavenly picnic the little trio all agreed as to that; and when Ivory saw the Baxter girls coming up the shady path that led along the river from the Indian Cellar to the bridge, it was a merry group and a transfigured Rodman that caught his eye. The boy, trailing on behind with the baskets and laden with tin dippers and wildflowers, seemed another creature from the big-eyed, quiet little lad he saw every day. He had chattered like a magpie, eaten like a bear, is torn his jacket getting wild columbines for Patty, been nicely darned by Waitstill, and was in a state of hilarity that rendered him quite unrecognizable.

"We've had a lovely picnic!" called Patty; "I wish you had been with us!"

"You didn't ask me!" smiled Ivory, picking up Waitstill's mending-basket from the nook in the trees where she had hidden it for safe-keeping.

"We've played games, Ivory," cried the boy. "Patty made them up herself. First we had the 'Landing of the Pilgrims,' and Waitstill made believe be the figurehead of the Mayflower. She stood on a great boulder and sang:—

> 'The breaking waves dashed high
> On a stern and rock-bound coast'—

and, oh! she was splendid! Then Patty was Pocahontas and I was Cap'n John Smith, and look, we are all dressed up for the Indian wedding!"

Waitstill had on a crown of white birch bark and her braid of hair, twined with running ever-green, fell to her waist. Patty was wreathed with columbines and decked with some turkey feathers that she had put in her basket as too pretty to throw away. Waitstill looked rather conscious in her unusual finery, but Patty sported it with the reckless ease and innocent vanity that characterized her.

"I shall have to run into father's store to put myself tidy," Waitstill said, "so good-bye, Rodman, we'll have another picnic some day. Patty, you must do the chores this afternoon, you know, so that I can go to choir rehearsal."

Rodman and Patty started up the hill gayly with their burdens, and Ivory walked by Waitstill's side as she pulled off her birch-bark crown and twisted her braid around her head with a heightened color at being watched.

"I'll say good-bye now, Ivory, but I'll see you at the meeting-house," she said, as she neared the store. "I'll go in here and brush the pine needles off, wash my hands, and rest a little before rehearsal. That's a puzzling anthem we have for to-morrow."

"I have my horse here; let me drive you up to the church."

"I can't, Ivory, thank you. Father's orders are against my driving out with any one, you know."

"Very well, the road is free, at any rate. I'll hitch my horse

down here in the woods somewhere and when you start to walk I shall follow and catch up with you. There's luckily only one way to reach the church from here, and your father can't blame us if we both take it!"

And so it fell out that Ivory and Waitstill walked together in the cool of the afternoon to the meeting-house on Tory Hill. Waitstill kept the beaten path on one side and Ivory that on the other, so that the width of the country road, deep in dust, was between them, yet their nearness seemed so tangible a thing that each could feel the heart beating in the other's side. Their talk was only that of tried friends, a talk interrupted by long beautiful silences; silences that come only to a man and woman whose understanding of each other is beyond question and answer. Not a sound broke the stillness, yet the very air, it seemed to them, was shedding meanings: the flowers were exhaling a love secret with their fragrances, the birds were singing it boldly from the tree-tops, yet no word passed the man's lips or the girl's. Patty would have hung out all sorts of signals and lures to draw the truth from Ivory and break through the walls of his self-control, but Waitstill, never; and Ivory Boynton was made of stuff so strong that he would not speak a syllable of love to a woman unless he could say all. He was only five-and-twenty, but he had been reared in a rigorous school, and had learned in its poverty, loneliness, and anxiety lessons of self-denial and self-control that bore daily fruit now. He knew that Deacon Baxter would never allow any engagement to exist between Waitstill and himself; he

also knew that Waitstill would never defy and disobey her father if it meant leaving her younger sister to fight alone a dreary battle for which she was not fitted. If there was little hope on her side there seemed even less on his. His mother's mental illness made her peculiarly dependent upon him, and at the same time held him in such strict bondage that it was almost impossible for him to get on in the world or even to give her the comforts she needed. In villages like Riverboro in those early days there was no putting away, even of men or women so demented as to be something of a menace to the peace of the household; but Lois Boynton was so gentle, so fragile, so exquisite a spirit, that she seemed in her sad aloofness simply a thing to be sheltered and shielded somehow in her difficult life journey. Ivory often thought how sorely she needed a daughter in her affliction. If the baby sister had only lived, the home might have been different; but alas! there was only a son,—a son who tried to be tender and sympathetic, but after all was nothing but a big, clumsy, uncomprehending man-creature, who ought to be felling trees, ploughing, sowing, reaping, or at least studying law, making his own fortune and that of some future wife. Old Mrs. Mason, a garrulous, good-hearted grandame, was their only near neighbor, and her visits always left his mother worse rather than better. How such a girl as Waitstill would pour comfort and beauty and joy into a lonely house like his, if only he were weak enough to call upon her strength and put it to so cruel a test. God help him, he would never do that, especially as he could not earn enough to keep a larger

family, bound down as he was by inexorable responsibilities. Waitstill, thus far in life, had suffered many sorrows and enjoyed few pleasures; marriage ought to bring her freedom and plenty, not carking care and poverty. He stole long looks at the girl across the separating space that was so helpless to separate,—feeding his starved heart upon her womanly graces. Her quick, springing step was in harmony with the fire and courage of her mien. There was a line or two in her face,—small wonder; but an "unconquerable soul" shone in her eyes; shone, too, in no uncertain way, but brightly and steadily, expressing an unshaken joy in living. Valiant, splendid, indomitable Waitstill! He could never tell her, alas! but how he gloried in her!

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.