

The Story of Walt Still Baxter



BY
KATE DOUGLAS WIGGIN

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Kate Douglas Wiggin

Author of "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm"

CHAPTER XIV. Looked Out

Walt Still was almost stunned by the suddenness of this catastrophe. She stood with her feet rooted to the earth for several minutes and then walked slowly away out of sight of the house. There was a chair beside the grindstone under the Porter apple tree, and she sank into it, crossing her arms on the back and, bowing her head on them, burst into a fit of weeping as tumultuous and passionate as it was silent, for, although her body fairly shook with sobs, no sound escaped.

The minutes passed, perhaps an hour; she did not take account of time. The moon went behind clouds, the night grew misty, and the stars faded one by one. There would be rain to-morrow, and there was a great deal of hay cut, so she thought in a vagrant sort of way. Meanwhile Patty upstairs was in a state of suppressed excitement and terror. It was a quarter of an hour before her father settled himself in bed, then an age it seemed to her before she heard his heavy breathing. When she thought it quite safe she slipped on a print wrapper, took her shoes in her hand and crept noiselessly downstairs, out through the kitchen and into the shed. Lifting the heavy bar that held the big doors in place, she closed them softly behind her, stepped out and looked about her in the darkness. Her quick eye espied in the distance near the barn the bowed figure in the chair, and she flew through the wet grass without a thought of her bare feet till she reached her sister's side and held her in a close embrace.

"My darling! in my own poor darling!" she cried softly, the tears running down her cheeks. "How wicked, how unjust, to serve my dearest sister so! Don't cry, my blessing, don't cry! You frighten me! I'll take care of you, dear. Next time I'll interfere. I'll scratch and bite, yes, I'll strangle anybody that dares to shame you and lock you out of the house—you, the dearest, the patientest, the best!"

Walt still wiped her eyes. "Let me go farther away where we can talk," she whispered. "Where had we better sleep?" Patty asked. "On the hay, I think, though we shall stifle with the heat," and Patty moved toward the barn. "No, you must go back to the house at once, Patty, dear. Father might wake and call you and that would make matters worse. It's beginning to drizzle or I should stay out in the air. Oh, I wonder if father's mind is going and if this is the beginning of the end. If he is in his sober senses he could not be so strange, so suspicious, so unjust."

"He could be anything, say anything, do anything!" exclaimed Patty. "Perhaps he is not responsible and perhaps he is; it doesn't make much difference to us. Come along, blessed darling! I'll tuck you in and then I'll creep back to the house if you say I must. I'll go down and make the kitchen fire in the morning; you stay out here and see what happens. A good deal will happen, I'm thinking. If father speaks to me of you! I shouldn't be surprised to see the fur flying in all directions. I'll seize the first moment to bring you out a cup of coffee and we'll consult about what to do. I may tell you now I'm all for running away!"

Walt still's first burst of wretchedness had subsided and she had recovered her balance. "I'm afraid we must wait a little longer, Patty," she advised. "Don't mention my name to father, but see how he acts in the morning. He was so wild, so unlike himself, that I almost hope he may forget what he said and sleep it off. Yes, we must just wait."

"No doubt he'll be far calmer in the morning if he remembers that if he turns you out, he faces the prospect of three meals a day cooked by me," said Patty. "That's what he thinks he would like, but, as a matter of fact, I shall tell him that when you sleep I sleep, and when you eat I eat, and when you stop cooking I stop. He won't get with two meals a day as a matter of fact, not at the beginning of the morning." And Patty, giving Walt still a last kiss and a warm, hearty wave, made reluctantly back to the house by the open door through which she had left.

you notice that her eyes really see nothing, but are looking beyond you, that you know there is anything wrong."

"If she appears so like other people, why don't the neighbors go to see her once in a while?" "Callers make her unhappy, she says, and Ivory told me that he dared not encourage any company in the house for fear of exciting her and making her an object of gossip besides. He knows her ways perfectly and that she is safe and content with her fancies when she is alone, which is seldom, after all."

"What does she talk about?" asked Patty. "Her husband mostly. She is expecting him to come back daily. We knew that before, of course, but no one can realize it till they see her setting the table for him and putting a saucer of wild strawberries by his plate, going about the kitchen softly, like a gentle ghost."

"It gives me the shudders!" said Patty. "I couldn't bear it. If she never sees strangers, what in the world did she make of you? How did you begin?" "I told her I had known Ivory ever since we were school children. She was rather strange and indifferent at first and then she seemed to take a fancy to me."

"That's queer!" said Patty, smiling fondly and giving Walt still's hair the hasty brush of a kiss. "She told me she had a girl baby, born two or three years after Ivory, and that she had always thought it died when it was a few weeks old. Then suddenly she came closer to me—"

"Oh, Walt, weren't you terrified?" "No, not in the least. Neither would you have been if you had been there. She put her arms round me and all at once I understood that the poor thing mistook me just for a moment for her own daughter come back to life. It was a sudden fancy, and I don't think it lasted, but I didn't know how to deal with it or contradict it, so I simply tried to soothe her and let her ease her heart by talking to me. She said when I left her: 'Where is your house? I hope it is near! Do come again and sit with me. Strength flows into my weakness when you hold my hand! I somehow feel, Patty, that she needs a woman friend even more than a doctor. And now, what am I to do? How can I forsake her, and yet here is this new difficulty with father!'"

"I shouldn't forsake her. Go there when you can, but be more careful about it. You told father that you didn't regret what you had done, and that when he ordered you to do unreasonable things you should disobey him. After all, you are not a black slave. Father will never think of that particular thing again, perhaps, any more than he ever alluded to my driving to Saco with Mrs. Day after you had told him it was necessary for one of us to go there occasionally. He knows that if he is too hard on us Dr. Perry or Uncle Bart would take him in hand. They would have done it long ago if we had ever given any one even a hint of what we have to endure. You will be all right because you only want to do kind, neighborly things. I am the one that will always have to suffer because I can't prove that it's a Christian duty to deceive father and steal off to a dance or a frolic. Yet I might as well be a nun in a convent for all the fun I get. I want a white book muslin dress; I want a pair of thin shoes with buckles; I want a white hat, with a wreath of yellow roses; I want a volume of Byron's poems, and, oh, nobody knows—nobody but the Lord could understand—how I want a string of gold beads!"

"Patty, Patty! To hear you chatter anybody would imagine you thought of nothing but frivolities. I wish you wouldn't do yourself such injustice. Even when nobody hears you but me, it is wrong."

"Sometimes when you think I'm talking nonsense it's really the gospel truth," said Patty. "I'm not a grand, splendid character, Walt still, and it's no use your deceiving yourself about me. If you do you'll be disappointed." "Go and parboil the beans and get them into the pot, Patty. Pick up some of the windfalls and make a green apple pie, and I'll be with you in the kitchen myself before long. I never expect to be disappointed in you, Patty—only continually surprised and pleased."

"I thought I'd begin making some soft soap today," said Patty mischievously as she left the room. "We have enough grease saved up. We don't really need it yet, but it makes such a disgusting smell that I'd rather like father to have it with his dinner. It's not much of a punishment for our sleepless night."

Continued tomorrow

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Sunday Was Big Day At Fort Barnwell

CITIZENS OF THAT PLACE PROPERLY OBSERVED THE OCCASION.

FORT BARNWELL—June 24

Sunday was a day that will be long remembered in this community. Early in the morning the clouds hung low, and a few drops of rain came down, which caused our people to fear that it might be a rainy day, but it soon cleared up, and Old Sol shown forth in all his glory. It was a day that had been looked forward to as a day of profit, and pleasure by all and especially the Christian people of our community, it was a gala day for the Baptist Church of this village.

Early in the morning people began to come in from all directions, and by 11 o'clock quite a crowd had assembled at the church, and had about filled it, when the beloved pastor Rev. W. M. Huggins went in the stand, and opened the meeting by singing. After which he preached one of his soul stirring sermons, from Hebrew 11-1. "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for the evidence of things not seen," and he handled his subject to the satisfaction of his large congregation, though the weather was very warm. After preaching everybody repaired to their homes to partake of dinner, and at 2 o'clock everybody that wished to go down to Maple Cypress bridge, and witness the baptizing were busy getting ready, and in a short time quite a string of wagons, buggies, carts, and some on horse back, were on the road going to the river, a distance of about two miles.

When the baptismal water was reached, and teams were all secured, and the candidates were in readiness a hymn was sung, after which Rev. W. M. Huggins, the pastor, lead off into the river nine candidates, and administered the ordinance of baptism to them, it was a beautiful sight to behold, and will long linger in the minds of those who witnessed it. As soon as everything was in readiness every body headed for Fort Barnwell, arriving there about 4:30 o'clock.

Quite a delegation from Dover came over, among who were seven from the Dover church for baptism, and two from our church.

At the closing of the day at 8 o'clock we all again assembled at the church, and enjoyed another fine sermon from the pastor on "The Wining of a Soul." Text—"He must need go through Samaria," after which a social greeting and hand shake among friends, and visitors. All went to their homes feeling that they

had done all they could through the day for the good work, and thanking God (that as they believe) Fort Barnwell is getting on higher ground.

At the morning service there was two additions to the church. Our Sunday school is on the upward grade, our attendance is about 130 on roll, and every Sunday new additions are being made under the superintendency of our dear brother J. W. Lane, who is held in the highest esteem by not only his School, and neighborhood, but by the whole county.

This school has some competent teachers as can be found anywhere in this section. Mr. M. D. Lane, and Mr. R. W. Lamb are both doing a fine work as teachers in this school, and to make it short Fort Barnwell school is to the good all along as far as the writer can learn, and see. Mrs. M. D. Lane is another fine teacher, she is leading the children in the right way to usefulness.

Mrs. J. B. Hellen, the efficient pianist is furnishing some fine music which seems to be highly appreciated by not only the church, and school, but by the community at large.—Sun please copy.

J. LEON WILLIAMS
ATTORNEY AT LAW
126 MIDDLE ST.
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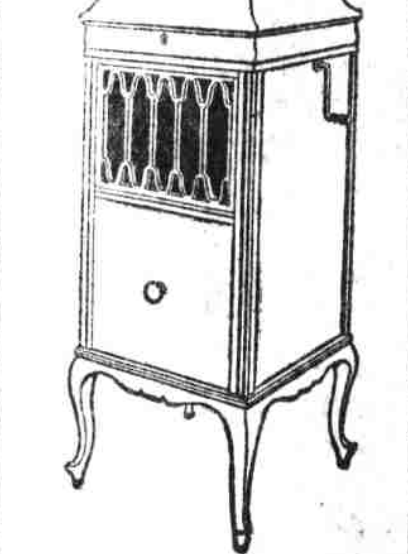
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