

## SEVENTEEN

A tale of youth and summer time and the Baxter family, especially William.  
By BOOTH TAKINGTON.

Genesis says, it's because that suit is haunted.  
"What?"  
"You mean," said Jane solemnly, "Genesis says it's haunted. Genesis says everybody over on the avenue knows all about that suit, an' he says that's why One Eye Beljus never could sell it before."  
"Genesis says One Eye Beljus tried to sell it to a colored man for \$3, but the man said he wouldn't put it on, or \$500, an' Genesis says he wouldn't either, because it belonged to a dago



'An' he cut a lady's head off with it!

waiter that—that—". Jane's voice sank to a whisper of uncanny horror. She was having a wonderful time. "Mamma, this dago waiter, he lived over on the avenue, an' he took a case knife ne'd sharpened—an' he cut a lady's head off with it!"  
Mrs. Baxter screamed faintly.  
"An' he got hung, mamma! If you don't believe it you can ask One Eye Beljus. I guess he knows! An' he sold this suit to One Eye Beljus when he was in jail, mamma. He sold it to him before he got hung, mamma."

"Hush, Jane!"  
But Jane couldn't hush now. "An' he had that suit on when he cut the lady's head off, mamma, an' that's why it's haunted. They cleaned it all up except a few little spots of bl—"

"Jane!" shouted her mother, "you must not talk about such things an' Genesis mustn't tell you stories of that sort!"

"Well, how could he help it if he told me about Willie?" Jane urged reasonably.

"Never mind! Did that crazy ch—Did Willie leave the baskets in that dreadful place?"

"Yes'm, an' his watch an' pin," Jane informed her impressively. "An' One Eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis knew Willie, because One Eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis thought Willie could get the \$3.00, an' One Eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis thought he could get anything more out of him besides that."

"He told Genesis he hadn't told Willie he could have the suit, after all. He just told him he thought he could, but he wouldn't say for certain till he brought him the \$3.00. So Willie left all his things there, an' his watch an'—"

"What will do?" Mrs. Baxter's voice was grave. "I don't want to hear any more!"

Mrs. Baxter went hurriedly into William's room and made a brief inspection of his clothes closet and dressing table; then she strode to the window and called loudly:

"Genesis!"  
"Genesis!" came the voice from below.  
"Go to that lumber yard where Mr. William is at work and bring him here to me at once. If he declines to come tell him—". Her voice broke oddly. She choked, but Jane could not decide with what emotion. "Tell him—tell him I ordered you to use force if necessary! Hurry!"

"Yes'm!"  
Jane ran to the window in time to see Genesis departing seriously through the back gate.

"Mamma!"  
"Don't talk to me now, Jane," Mrs. Baxter said crisply. "I want you to go down in the yard, and when Willie comes tell him I'm waiting for him here in his own room. And don't come with him, Jane. Run!"

"Yes, mamma," Jane was pleased with this appointment. She anxiously desired to be the first to see how Willie "looked."

He looked flustered and flustered and breathless, and there were blisters upon the reddened palms of his hands. "What on earth's the matter, mother?" he asked as he stood panting before her. "Genesis said something was wrong, and he said you told him to tell me if I wouldn't come."

"Oh, no!" she cried. "I only meant I thought perhaps you wouldn't obey any ordinary message."

"Well, well, it doesn't matter, but please hurry and say what you want to, because I got to get back and—"

"No," Mrs. Baxter said quietly, "you're not going back to count any more shingles, Willie. How much have you earned?"

He swallowed, but spoke bravely. "Thirty-six cents. But I've been getting lots faster the last two hours, and there's a good deal of time before o'clock, Mother—"

"No," she said. "You're going over to that horrible place where you've left your clothes and your watch and all those other things in the two baskets, and you're going to bring them home at once."

"Mother?" he cried, aghast. "Who told you?"  
"It doesn't matter. You don't want your father to find out, do you? Then get those things back here as quickly

as you can. They'll have to be fumigated before being in that room, though they've never been out of the baskets," he protested hotly, "except just to be looked at. They're my things, mother, and I had a right to do what I needed to with 'em, didn't I?" His utterance became difficult. "You and father just can't understand, and you won't do anything to help me—"

"Willie, you can go to the party," she said gently. "You didn't need those frightful clothes at all."

"I do!" he cried. "I got to have 'em! I can't go in my old clothes! There's a reason you wouldn't understand why I can't. I just can't!"

"Yes," she said, "you can go to the party."

"I can't either—not unless you give me \$3.24 or unless I can get back to the lumber yard and earn the rest before—"

"No!" And the warm color that had rushed over Mrs. Baxter during Jane's sensational recital returned with a vengeance. Her eyes flashed. "If you'd rather I sent a policeman for those baskets I'll send one. I should prefer to do it—much—and to have that rascal arrested. If you don't want me to send a policeman you can go for them yourself, but you must start within ten minutes, because if you don't I'll telephone headquarters. Ten minutes, Willie, and I mean it!"

He cried out protesting. She would make him a thing of scorn forever and sell his honor if she sent a policeman. Mr. Beljus was a fair and honest tradesman, he explained, passionately; also the garments in question, though not entirely new nor of the highest mode, were of good material and in splendid condition.

Unmistakably they were evening clothes and such a bargain at \$14 that William would guarantee to sell them for twenty after he had worn them this one evening. Mr. Beljus himself had no more to say, and he was content of letting them go at fourteen to anybody else, and as for the two poor baskets of worn and useless articles offered in exchange, and a bent scarf-pin, and a woman's old silver watch that had belonged to Great Uncle Ben—why, the \$10.40 allowed upon them was beyond all ordinary liberality. It was almost charity.

There was only one place in town where evening clothes were rented, and the suspicious persons in charge had insisted that William obtain from his father a guarantee to insure the return of the garments in perfect condition. So that was hopeless. And wasn't it better also to wear clothes which had known only one previous occupant, as was the case with Mr. Beljus' offering, than to hire what chance hundreds had hired? Finally, there was only one thing to be considered, and this was the fact that that had belonged to Great Uncle Ben—why, the \$10.40 allowed upon them was beyond all ordinary liberality. It was almost charity.

CHAPTER XVII.  
Youth and Mr. Patcher.

AND the end of it was, of course, victory for the woman—victory both moral and physical. Three-quarters of an hour later she was unburling the contents of the two baskets and putting the things back in place, illuminating these actions with an expression of strong distaste in spite of broken assurances that Mr. Beljus had not more than looked any of the articles offered to him for valuation.

At dinner, which was unusually early that evening, Mrs. Baxter did not often glance toward her son. She kept her eyes from that white face and spent most of her time in urging upon Mr. Baxter that he should be prompt in dressing for a card club meeting which he and she were to attend that evening.

William retired to his own room, where he lay upon his bed in the darkness. He heard the evening noises of the house faintly through the closed door—voices and the clatter of metal and china from the faraway kitchen. Jane's laugh in the hall, the opening and closing of the doors. Then his father seemed to be in distress about something. William heard him complaining to Mrs. Baxter, and though the words were indistinct, the tone was vigorously plaintive.

Everything was quiet now. The open window showed as a greenish oblong set in black, and William knew that in a little while there would come through the stillness of that window the distant sound of violins. And as he lay on his dreary bed he thought of brightly lighted rooms where other boys were dressing eagerly, faces and hair shining, hearts beating high—boys who would possess this last evening and the "last waits together," the last smile and the last sigh.

Now arrived that moment he had most painfully anticipated, and dance music drifted on the night, but there came a tapping upon his door, and a soft voice spoke.

"Willie?"  
With a sharp exclamation William swung his legs over the edge of his bed and sat up. Of all things he desired not he desired no conversation with or on the part of Jane. But he had forgotten to lock his door. The handle turned, and a dim little figure marched in.

"Willie, Adelia's girls to put me to bed."

"You g'way from here," he said huskily. "I haven't got time to talk to you. I'm busy."

"Well, you can wait a minute, can't you?" she asked reasonably. "I haf to tell you a joke on mamma."

"I don't want to hear any jokes."

"Well, I haf to tell you this one because she told me to. Oh! Jane clapped her hand over her mouth and jumped up and down, offering a fantastic silhouette against the light of the open door. "Oh, oh, oh!"

"What's the matter?"  
She told me to tell my goodness! I forgot that! Mamma took me oh alone right after dinner, an' she told me to tell you this joke on her a little after she an' papa had left the house but she said, 'Above all things, she said, don't let Willie know I said it to tell him.' That's just what she said an' here that's the very first thing I had to go an' do!"

"Well, what of it?"  
Jane quieted down. "Did you hear what a fuss papa was makin' when he was dressin' for the card party?"

"He had to go in his regular clothes," whispered Jane triumphantly. "An' this is the joke on mamma: You know that tailor that let papa's dress suit 'way out? Well, mamma thinks that 'way out must think she's crazy or some p'n, 'cause she took papa's dress suit to him last Monday to get it pressed for this card party an' she pressed it must of understood her to tell him to do lots besides just pressin' it. Any-way, he went an' altered it, an' he took it 'way, 'way by his regular clothes, an' papa couldn't begin to get into it!"

"Well, an' so it's all pressed an' everything, an' she stopped on the way out an' whispered to me that she'd got so upset over the joke on her that she couldn't remember where she put it when she took it out of papa's room after he gave up tryin' to get inside of it. An' that," cried Jane—"that's the funniest thing of all! Why, it's layin' right on her bed this very minute!"

In one bound William leaped through the open door. Two seconds sufficed for his passage through the hall to his mother's bedroom, and there, neatly spread upon the lace-covered bed and brighter than coronation robes, faster than Joseph's holy coat, it lay!

As a hurried wordling in almost perfectly fitting evening clothes passed out of his father's gateway and hurried toward the place whence faintly came the sound of dance music a child's voice called sweetly from an unidentified window of the darkened house behind him:

"Well, any-way, you try 'an' have a good time, Willie!"  
Jane's friendly but ill chosen "any-way" had touched doubts already annoying him. He was certain to be late for the party—late, indeed, and might prove difficult to obtain a proper number of dances with the sacred girl in whose honor the celebration was being held.

But as he hastened onward his spirits rose, and he did reply to Jane, after all, though he had placed a hundred yards between them.

"Yes, and you can bet your bottom dollar I will too!" he muttered between his determined teeth.

Spellbound groups of uninvited persons, most of them colored, reared their forearms upon the rail of the Patcher's picket fence, offering to William a silhouette like that of a crowd at a fire, or a line of soldiers in some form of skimming, shimmering, wavering over a white platform, while high overhead the young moon sprayed a shimmering light down through the maple leaves to where processions of rose globes hung floating in the blue night.

Yonder—somewhere in the breath of dancing radiance—his green eyes met all her court about her. Queen and court, thought William, and nothing less exorbitant could have expressed his feeling.

A sense of picturesqueness—his own picturesqueness—made him walk rather theatrically as he passed through the groups of humble onlookers outside the picket fence. Many of these turned to stare at the belated guest, and William was unconscious of neither their low estate nor his own quality as a petulant man about town in almost perfectly fitting evening dress. A faint, cold smile was allowed to appear upon his lips, and a fragment from a story he had read came momentarily to his mind—"Through the gaping crowds the young Augustan noble was borne down from the Palatine, scornful in his jeweled litter full of slaves."

An admiring murmur reached William's ear. "Oh, oh, honey, look at them long tail suits! At's a rich boy, honey!"

"Tessum, so! Bet he got his pockets pack' full o' twenty dollar gold pieces right his minute!"

"Willie allowed the coldness of his faint smile to increase to become scornful. These poor sidewalk creatures little knew what seethed inside the alabaster of the young Augustan noble! What was it to them that this

was Miss Pratt's last night and that he intended to dance and dance with her on the last night of his life?

Upon one of the posts of the gateway there rested the elbow of a contemplative man, middle aged or a little worse. He all persons having pleasure or business within the bright inclosure he was that evening the least important, being merely the back of a head and parent who paid the bills—Mr. Patcher.

One subject was preoccupying both Mr. Patcher and William. Their two views, though again founded upon one thought, had no real congeniality. The preoccupying subject was the imminence of Miss Pratt's departure. Neither Mr. Patcher nor William forgot it for an instant. No matter what else played upon the surface of their attention, each kept saying to himself underneath: "This is the last night—the last night! Miss Pratt is going away—going away tomorrow!"

The unuttered words advanced tragically toward the gate in the head of the Patcher at the same time that they moved contentedly away in the head of Mr. Patcher, for Mr. Patcher caught sight of his wife just then and went to join her as she sank wearily upon the front steps of the house.

"Taking a rest for a minute?" he inquired. "By George, we're both tired. To a good, long rest after tonight! If we could afford it we'd go away to a quiet little sanitarium in the hills somewhere, and—"

His staring eyes followed the movements of a stately young woman entering the gates. "Look at it!" said Mr. Patcher in a whisper. "Just look at it!"

"Look at what?" asked his wife.

"That Baxter boy!" said Mr. Patcher as William passed on toward the dancers. "What's he think he's imitating—Henry Irving? Look at his walk!"

"He walks that way a good deal lately, I've noticed," said Mrs. Patcher in a tired voice. "So do Joe Bullitt and—"

"He didn't even come to say good evening to you," Mr. Patcher interrupted. "Talk about manners nowadays! These young—"

"Well, we're used to that," said Mr. Patcher. "None of 'em sees us. They've worn holes in all the cane-seated chairs of the embankment or the lunatic asylum, and I haven't been able to sit down anywhere downstairs for three months without sitting on some dam boy. But you'll never see him again, will you?"

"Well, thank the Lord, it's over—over tonight!" His voice became reflective. "That Baxter boy was the worst until he took to coming in the daytime when I was downstairs. I couldn't have stood it if he'd kept on coming in the evening. If I had to listen to any more of his talking or singing either before or after the lunatic asylum would have had me, sure! I see he's got hold of his daddy's dress suit!"

Mr. Patcher inquired, "How do you know?"

Mr. Patcher smiled. "How I happen to know is a secret," he said. "I for-remember the time Miss Pratt told me that Mrs. Baxter had hidden it, or something, so that Willie couldn't see it, but I guess Jane wouldn't tell me that she had hidden it, would she?"

"I don't think he does just now," said Mrs. Patcher. "She was fixed upon the dancing platform, which most of the dancers were abandoning as the music fell away to an interval of silence. In the center of the platform there remained one group, consisting of Miss Pratt and five orators, and of the orators the most impassioned and gesticulating was William."

"They all seem to want to dance with her all the time," said Mrs. Patcher. "I heard her telling one of the boys half an hour ago that she could give him as either the twenty-eight regular dance or the sixteenth extra."

Nothing could have been more evident than William's difficulties. They continued to exist with equal obviousness when the group broke up in some confusion after a few minutes of animated discussion, Mr. Wallace Banks that busy and executive young man, bearing Miss Pratt triumphantly off to the lemonade punch bowl, while William pursued Johnnie Watson and Joe Bullitt.

"Now you look here, Johnnie!" William said vehemently, "and you listen too, Joe! You both got seven dances apiece with her, anyway, all on account of my not getting here early enough, and you got to go!"

"It wasn't because of any such reason," young Mr. Watson protested. "I asked her for mine two days ago."

"I heard her telling me it was!" William cried. "Just because I never thought of sneaking in ahead like that, you go and—"

"Well, you ought to thought of it!" Johnnie retorted, jerking his arm free of William's grasp. "I can't stand here gabbin' all night!" And he hurried away.

CHAPTER XVIII.  
Miss Boko.

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"Te good! Can't you wait a minute?" William cried, keeping his grip upon Joe's lapels. "You got to give me anyway two out of all your dances with her! You heard her tell me your self that she'd be willing if you or Johnnie or—"

"Well, I only got five or six with her and a couple extras. Johnnie's got seven. Why'n't you go after Johnnie? I bet he'd help you out, all right, if you kept after him. What you want to pester me for, Bill?"

William swallowed, and, increasing the affectionate desperation of his clutch upon Mr. Bullitt's lapels, "Joe," he began huskily—"Joe, if I'd got six regular and two extras with Miss Pratt last night here, and you got here late, and it wasn't your fault—I couldn't help being late! Could I? I wasn't my fault I was late, I guess it was. Well, if I was in your place I wouldn't act the way you and Johnnie do—not in a thousand years I wouldn't! I'd say, 'You want a couple of my dances with Miss Pratt, ole man? Why, certainly!'"

"Yes, you would?" was the cynical comment of Mr. Bullitt, whose averted face and reluctant shoulders indicated a strong desire to conclude the interview. "Tonight especially!" he added.

"Look here, Joe," said William desperately, "don't you realize that this is the very last night Miss Pratt's going to be in this town?"

"You bet I do!" These words, though vehement, were inaudible, being formed in the mind of Mr. Bullitt, but, for diplomatic reasons, not projected upon the air by his vocal organs.

William continued, "Joe, you and I have been friends ever since you and I were boys." He spoke with emotion, but Joe had no appearance of being favorably impressed. "And when I look back," said William, "I expect I've done more favors for you than I ever have for any other—"

But Mr. Bullitt briskly interrupted this appealing reminiscence. "Listen here, Silly Bill," he said, becoming all at once friendly and encouraging—"Bill, there's other girls here you can get dances with. There's one or two of 'em sittin' around in the yard. You can have a bully time even if you did come late."

And, with the air of one discharging happily all the obligations of which William had reminded him, he added, "I'll tell you that much, Bill!"

"Joe, you got to give me anyway one dance!"

"Look!" said Mr. Bullitt eagerly. "Look, sittin' yonder, over under that tree all by herself! That's a visiting girl named Miss Boko. She's visiting some old uncle or something she's got living here, and I bet you could—"

"Joe, you got to—"

"I bet that Miss Boko's a good dancer or two," Joe continued warmly. "Mr. Patcher says so. She was trying to get to dance with her myself, but I couldn't or I would of. Honest, Bill, I would of! Bill, if it was you I'd say right in there before anybody else go a start, and I'd—"

"Ole man," said William gently, "remember the time Miss Pratt told me that Mrs. Baxter had hidden it, or something, so that Willie couldn't see it, but I guess Jane wouldn't tell me that she had hidden it, would she?"

"I don't think he does just now," said Mrs. Patcher. "She was fixed upon the dancing platform, which most of the dancers were abandoning as the music fell away to an interval of silence. In the center of the platform there remained one group, consisting of Miss Pratt and five orators, and of the orators the most impassioned and gesticulating was William."

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