

HAPPY HOUSE

By Jane D. Abbott

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Alone in her own room a storm of anger shook her. "I hate her!" she cried out to the ugly walls. "I hate her! She's—just—stone!"

"I'm glad I'm not a real Leavitt! We were so happy!" Then, really frightened, Nancy listened intently to catch some word from the other room.

CHAPTER VII.

Aunt Milly's Story.

When Nancy could stand the interval of quiet no longer, she went back to Miss Milly's door. She did not even knock. So sure was she of finding a crushed and heartbroken Aunt Milly within that she stood dumfounded before the little creature who sat bolt upright upon the couch.

"Come in, my dear—and close the door!"

Everything about Miss Milly seemed to say that "the worm has turned." There was a glow on her face different from that it had worn out in the orchard; it seemed to come from some fire within.

"Open every blind in the room, Nancy," she commanded in a tone that was new for Aunt Milly. "I might as well get what light I can in here. Now come and sit beside me."

"For a moment Aunt Milly patted Nancy's hand and said nothing. Then she gave a little sigh.

"I can't tell you, Nancy, I can't even begin to tell you, what you've done for me—taking me out there! If I never go again, I've had it once. And it's sort of stiffened something inside of me!"

She fell silent again. Nancy was wishing that she could have heard what had passed between Aunt Sabrina and Miss Milly that had left Miss Milly so defiant!

Aunt Milly seemed to read her thought.

"She was dreadfully angry and it was partly because she was frightened—really frightened. You see, Nancy, sister Sabrina thinks things must always go just so and that it's almost wicked to try—different things. She says—I've made my bed!"

"What does she mean, Aunt Milly?"

"It's a long story dear."

"I'd like to hear it, Aunt Milly."

"I suppose you ought to know—someone else may tell you, old Webb or B'lindy, or even Sabrina, though she'd rather die first! I think I used to be something like you, Nancy, or I would have been, if it hadn't been for—the trouble!"

"Will it make you unhappy to tell it, Aunt Milly?"

"No, child. I used to lie here by the hour and think things over and over, but after awhile I got so things sort of blurred—I suppose I grew resigned and all the fight inside of me died. There never was much. You see Sabrina brought me up and she was as stern then as she is now. Our father was like that, too. My mother died when I was a baby."

"When father died Sabrina had the care of me. I suppose she tried to bring me up well; she was very strict and—never seemed to understand! And when I was quite young I began to dream of getting away from the islands. I wanted to go away to school somewhere and learn to do something—I did not much care what—that would keep me out in the world. Finally I decided that I wanted to study music and then, sometime, teach it. It wasn't much to want, was it, dear? But goodness me, when I went to Sabrina with my plan she was terribly angry. You might have thought I had suggested something wicked! She simply couldn't understand! There was enough money for us both to live on and she said I was selfish and inconsiderate to want to go away. She talked a great deal about the Leavitt position and being a lady and learning contentment, and the more she talked the more restless and discontented I grew! And the more I dreamed of what waited out in the world beyond those little islands.

"After a long while, Nancy, I made up my mind to go, anyway! It was not easy to do, because I'm not very brave, and the trouble we'd had sort of made me hate to take any step that might make a break between Sabrina and me. But I had to do it. I simply couldn't seem to face a life here. That's hard for you to believe,

isn't it, dear? But I was a different creature, then. Well, one night I packed some clothes and slipped away. I walked to North Hero and caught the train for Burlington. I was going from there to—to New York.

Breathlessly, Nancy whispered, "What happened then?"

"The train was wrecked outside of Burlington!"

"Oh—Aunt Milly!"

"I was terribly hurt. I lay for weeks in a hospital in Burlington and they didn't know whether I'd live or die! I wish—"

she stopped short. "No, I don't! I'm glad I didn't die. Then they brought me home—like this!"

"Poor, poor little Aunt Milly!"

"But, listen, child—that isn't half all. It seems that on the same train was a young man from North Hero whom I had always known—and liked. But Aunt Sabrina had never approved of him, and long before she had forbidden his coming here. I did see him sometimes, though—I loved company and he was entertaining. There had never been more than a pleasant friendship between us, and I had not dreamed that he was going to Burlington on that train. He was killed. And when I came back from the hospital the story was on every tongue that I had been running away with Charlie Prince!"

"Oh, I was hurt in every part of me—my body and my soul and my mind! My precious dreams had crumbled forever and ever. And I had to face that dreadful scandal! Not that I ever saw a soul—Sabrina took care of that! She kept me shut up as though I had the plague. But through her reproachful eyes I was made to see the accusations of every man, woman and child on the Hero Islands. And I couldn't make her believe it wasn't so! She simply wouldn't talk about it. She went around with that dreadful look, day after day, and when she'd say anything at all, it was how I had brought shame to the Leavitt name. And after awhile I began to feel as though I had done something—more than just run away to study music. She made me understand that the only way I could atone for it all was by burying myself within these four walls."

"Then that's what she means by 'making your bed.'"

"Yes, dear, I was so crushed that I came to believe she was right. God knew that all I had wanted when I went away was a right to my own way of living, but His ways are inscrutable and His will has to be done; Sabrina called it the sword of wrath and the justice of the Almighty, and it didn't make much difference to me what it was called—I was here. That's my story, dear, that's the way I've lived until—today. But you've changed it. Something inside of me that I thought was dead—isn't dead at all! Do you know what I told Sabrina? I told her I didn't care what she thought, that I guessed when a woman was 40 years old and over she could decide things for herself and if just going out there in the orchard was wicked, then I'd go on being wicked! That's what I told her. Dear, dear, you should have seen her face!"

"Hurrah, hurrah, Aunt Milly!"

"Poor Sabrina, I never spoke like that in my life to her! I've always been so—afraid, until today! I don't know what she'll do now. You must not blame her too much, Nancy dear, it's the Leavitt trouble that has made her what she is—it shadowed all our lives!"

"Aunt Milly, what was the Leavitt trouble?"

"Aunt Milly, what was the trouble you don't know? I shouldn't have spoken of it! I promised Sabrina I wouldn't speak to you—about it."

"But, Aunt Milly, I have a right to know, haven't I? Even Webb hinted about it, and it makes me feel as though I was—well, on the outside of things, to be kept in ignorance."

Miss Milly regarded her for a moment. "I told Sabrina that you wouldn't know! But may be you ought to. Somehow, telling things, too, makes them seem not so dreadful! I believe we Leavitts look troubles away too much—don't air them enough, maybe. Sabrina things it's as dreadful

now as it was the day it happened. It was about our brother. He was a year older than Sabrina. He wasn't at all like her, though, nor like my father. He was a gay and handsome, and high spirited and dreadfully extravagant. When I was very small I used to be frightened at the quarrels between him and my father—and they were always over money.

"One night—he had come home just before supper after being away for a week, no one knew where, and my father was very angry about that—they had a quarrel that seemed more bitter than any other. Besides, there was a thunder storm that made it seem worse. I had been sent to bed, but the lightning had frightened me, and I had crept downstairs to the sitting room. I opened the door. They were all there—for Sabrina always sided with my father—talking so loudly they did not hear me. My father's face frightened me more than the lightning and my brother's had turned dead white. I think my father had just offered him some money, for his wallet was in his hand and on the floor lay a bill, as though my brother had thrown it back. I began to cry and ran back to my room, more frightened by them than by the storm. And I lay there in my bed for hours, waiting for something to happen!"

"About midnight one dreadful bolt of lightning struck the house. It shattered the chimney all to pieces on the outside and inside, filled the sitting room with dust and pieces of mortar, cracked the mantel and moved it an inch and a half from the wall. But no one thought much of all that, because something far more dreadful had happened! My brother was gone and my father's wallet, the one I had seen in his hand, was missing. He remembered laying it on the mantel and my brother and Sabrina had seen him do it. It had contained over \$1,000 in bank notes. The next day my father found out that my brother had taken the early train out of North Hero. I was too young to understand much about it, but I used to pray, first, that my brother would come back and tell them he didn't take the wallet and then I'd pray that he'd never, never come back, so that they couldn't put him in prison!"

"That must have been Anne's grandfather," Nancy was thinking.

"He did come back, three weeks later," Miss Milly went on, "and there was a scene much worse than the night of the storm. They fought I was in the room. My father accused my brother of stealing the wallet and refused to let him say a word. 'I want no lies added to your other sins,' was what he said—I can hear him now. And my brother looked as though something had struck him. Then my father told him that if he'd take himself off and never darken the doors of Happy House again, nor communicate with his family in any way, the matter would be dropped forever—for the sake of the Leavitt name. My brother stood there for a moment; I remember, I wanted to run to him! Oh, I've wished I had—so often! But I was afraid of Sabrina—and my father. And then my brother turned and walked out of the room—and out of the door—and—down the path—and—"

Poor Miss Milly, worn out by the excitement of the day, began to cry softly.

Nancy had to jerk herself to break the spell of the story. Her face wrinkled in a frown. "It is—dreadful, isn't it, Aunt Milly? I don't mean his spending money and running debts and things, I mean—your—your father's horrid—mercilessness! Why, the courts don't treat the worst criminals like that! And they call it Leavitt pride—and honor! I call it injustice. I wish you had just run up and kissed him, then. It might have made everything so different!"

"So that's why I can't speak of Anne's father or grandfather," Nancy was thinking back of her frown. "And that's why Anne knew so little about her aunts!" Then aloud: "I'm glad you told me, Aunt Milly. It'll help us—be pals. We'll have other afternoons—like today—out in the sunshine. But now you must rest. And I'll get ready to face Aunt Sabrina!"

"She'll be dreadfully cross," sighed Miss Milly, with the glow all gone from her face.

"I'm not a bit afraid," and Nancy meant it, for within her breast smouldered such righteous indignation at Miss Sabrina and her precious ancestors that she welcomed the challenge.

Dressing hurriedly for supper

Nancy's eye caught the letter to Claire lying on her bureau. It seemed to her as though hours and hours had passed since she had so flippantly bade Claire "pray for me!"

She wanted to open the letter and dash off another page to tell Claire of all that had happened and how the "mystery" was a mystery no longer. Then, with the envelope in her hand, she remembered that it concerned Aunt's grandfather and that, perhaps, she had no right to tell! But she did open the sheet and scribble across the top: "All sorts of things have happened since I wrote this, and I may be back with you any moment. I can't tell you yet all about it, but I can say this, that I hate Happy House and I'm glad as can be that I'm only a pretend Real-Leavitt! Everybody isn't horrid, though, that nice old Webb built the cosiest seat up in my tree and surprised me."

In exactly 20 minutes, by the hands of her small watch, she must meet Miss Sabrina! Anyway, she could tell her just what she thought about the whole thing, for, without any doubt she'd be sent away! But there was Aunt Milly—she had promised Aunt Milly that there would be more afternoons in the orchard. Somehow she must fix that.

"I know," she waved her brush in mid air, "I'll bet B'linda!"

CHAPTER VIII.

B'lindy's Triumph.

No great general of war ever mapped out a plan of attack more carefully than Nancy laid hers! First she begged B'lindy to let her pick over the raspberries for supper. While doing this in the chummiest sort of way, it was very easy to tell B'lindy that she had eaten lots of raised biscuits but never any raised biscuits like she'd had at Happy House!

The last raspberry in the glass dish, Nancy in departing, whispered with a little laugh; "Weren't you dreadfully frightened this afternoon when you saw Aunt Sabrina? O! of course you weren't—Webb told me you were the only one who could really make Aunt Sabrina do anything, but goodness, I was!" Which was balm to B'lindy's injured pride; as the afternoon wore on B'lindy had been growing more and more indignant because she had not "stood on her two feet and spoke up to Sabrina Leavitt" instead of "turning tail like old Jonathan!"

Throughout the supper, by eating very fast, Nancy managed to conceal her nervousness and expectancy. Aunt Sabrina sat stiffly and looked very old and, somehow, by a twist of her lips managed to make Nancy understand that she, Nancy, was in deep disgrace and that in due time sentence of punishment would be passed. Between B'lindy and her mistress not a word was exchanged; B'lindy's head was tossed high and there was an air of "sniffing" about her that, if it had not all been so tragic, would have made the entire situation funny.

"Oh, what a place—what funny people!" cried Nancy to the stars as she leaned that night far out of her window. "How can I stand it! And why does not something happen quickly! It's just like Aunt Sabrina not to say a word and to keep me on pins and needles! That's the same way she treated Aunt Milly and that poor boy—years ago!" Thereupon Nancy let her fancy wander back to the "gay spirited, extravagant" brother and his story—Anne's grandfather. Had he cared, she wondered, had he died longing to see again the old Island home, or had it been a blessing—casting him out in the wide world. He must have met fortune somewhere, for Anne's father had been wealthy. Dear Anne—Nancy picked out the star that was farthest in the east and addressed it reverently. "If you can see Anne and she can see you will you tell her that she mustn't feel cross at the mess I've made of things. I tried to be careful but I'm me and, anyway, all the ignorance of her blessed peasants isn't any worse than the pride and narrowness of her own relatives! Good night, dearest Anne, for the last time I go to sleep in my prison walls—tomorrow I die!"

(Continued next week.)

A Wilkes-Barre, Pa., man spent \$417 on a tressou for his fiancée, then she became the wife of another man. He caused her arrest and charged her with receiving money under false pretenses.

"Ay yeost wain a yob," said a big husky sailor applying at an employment agency in San Francisco. "Ladies take man's yob, so I take ladies' yob." Then he explained his specialty would be taking care of babies and doing upstairs work.

His Slowness.
"Doctor Rave, the popular evangelist, emphatically declares that there is a hell."
"Dear suzz!" answered J. Fuller Gloom. "Has he just found it out? Why, almost immediately after my marriage more than twenty years ago I advised my brother-in-law to go there!"—Kansas City Star.

Dusuns Have Women Priests.
Women priests dominate the Dusuns, a curious tribe of people inhabiting a section of British North Borneo.

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if it MASTIN'S it isn't VITAMON

BOTH GOOD AND BAD NEEDED

Rev. Sparrow Jones Had Ingenious Reasoning With Which to Satisfy Aunt Miranda.

Whenever Rev. Sparrow Jones called on Aunt Miranda, it was her custom to set a plate of gingerbread before him and then ply him with what she called "ligious 'spoundings."

"What fo' does de Lawd send epilemics onto de land?" she asked him one day.

"When folks get so bad dey must be removed, some of 'em, Sister Miranda, den de Lawd permits de comin' of an epidemic," said the preacher; and he took a large bite of gingerbread.

"Uh," said Aunt Miranda. "Ef dat's so, how come de good people gits removed along wid de bad ones?" "De good ones is summoned fo' vittnesses," said Rev. Sparrow Jones. "De Lawd gibs every man a fair trial."—Philadelphia Ledger.

Remembrance.

I once wrote a verse to my lady's eyebrow.

It was beautiful, a charming bit of poetic fancy. Everybody admired it.

Now, five years later, this little poem has grown enormously in value. My lady herself treasures it—a sort of memento, I suppose, because—

She has no eyebrow to speak of.—Wayside Tales.

The ambitious man doesn't worry much about his gray matter.

Clear Case.

"I don't take prohibition cases," said the lawyer.

"But I'm an innocent man, I tell you. I'm charged with having liquor in my possession, but I'm the person who called up the police department and stated that I had found twenty-four quarts of Scotch buried in my backyard."

"You say you called up the police and let them carry off that Scotch when you might have concealed it in a hundred different places and defied the true owner to get possession of it?"

"Certainly."

"Well, you must be innocent. I'll engage to defend you."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

True Sympathy.

MacTaggart, a canny Scot, went to a motion picture show and sat down on the hat of the man next him.

"Get up! You're on my hat! Why don't you look before you sit down?" agonizingly cried the hat's owner.

MacTaggart arose and picked up the hat. "Ah, well," he remarked gently, "it might have been worse."

"Worse!" exclaimed the wrathful one. "It's ruined, man! How could it possibly be worse?"

"It might have been my ain," answered MacTaggart thoughtfully.

A young man in love resembles a map of the world—he embraces a good deal.

You wouldn't put on hobbles to run a foot race.

Then why load up on handicaps for the day's work?

A good deal of food, unwisely chosen, does weigh the body down and clog the digestion, and dull the brain.

Why put on the hobbles?

Grape-Nuts is a breakfast or lunch-time dish for those who want food efficiency, and mind and body efficiency.

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