

# HAPPY HOUSE

By Jane D. Abbott

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But the baby did not kick or squirm—he felt very comfortable in Miss Sabrina's arms—he snuggled ever so gently a little closer, turned his face toward the warmth of her embrace, and drawing up one little arm, laid it against her throat. The warm, soft baby fingers burned against Sabrina's throbbing pulse—the little spark crept down, down to her old, cold heart and kindled something there—something that swept her whole being. Cautiously she held the baby closer, pressed it to her breast so that she might feel the whole perfect little body; the little lips twisted and Sabrina, thinking it was a smile, smiled back with infinite tenderness. She forgot the storm raging without, her ears were deaf to its roar; after a little she leaned her head down until she could lay her cheek against the baby's soft head.

Within the darkened room a miracle was working!

Suddenly the air was split by a sharp crackle as of a hundred rifles spitting fire close at hand; and simultaneously came a deafening roar as though the very Heavens were dropping with a crash. Though it all pierced Aunt Milly's scream. The walls of Happy House trembled and swayed; for a moment everything went black before Sabrina's eyes! Then B'lindy, running through the hall brought her sharply back to her senses.

"We're struck—we're struck! Sabrina!" Jonathan!

Once more Happy House had been struck by lightning! The crashing had been the tumbling of the bricks of the chimney. And just as in that other storm, long before, the lightning had worked its vengeance on the old mantel. It lay in pieces on the broken brick-a-brac and mortar and bricks from the chimney.

But in the fear of fire no one thought of the mantel. B'lindy ran wildly around ordering Jonathan to throw buckets of water on any cranny that might possibly conceal a smoldering flame, at the same time heaping all kinds of curses down upon the heads of the neighbors who'd let Happy House burn right to the ground without lifting a finger. And Sabrina, after one look at the lightning's havoc, still with the baby in her arms, had gone to quiet Miss Milly.

When Jonathan's activity had threatened to destroy everything in the house with water, B'lindy finally became convinced that there was to be no fire. "Funniest lightning I ever see," she declared, breathlessly dropping into a chair; "set down that pail, Jonathan—you've most drowned us all. Thank Heaven, here comes Nancy."

Nancy and Peter, after one glance at the bricks scattered over the garden, had guessed what had happened.

"Struck—sure as preachin'! Lucky we ain't burned to a crisp. Just look at the muss!" and B'lindy swept her arm toward the sitting room door.

Nancy's face was tragic as she saw the broken mantel and the gaping fireplace. She clutched Peter's arm. "What a pity—what a shame! It was so very old and—and—" She leaned down and picked up one of the pieces. "Look, Peter, here are parts of the letters! See H-A-P. It had been cracked by another lightning storm, you know, years and years ago! Oh, I'm afraid it has been destroyed so that—" as she spoke she searched in the debris on the floor for more of the carving. Suddenly she cried out sharply and, straightening, held out an old, worn, stained leather wallet. "Peter! B'lindy! Aunt Sabrina!"

Her cry brought Miss Sabrina, alarmed, running.

"It must be—the wallet!"

Now it was Sabrina who cried out—a protesting, frightened cry. For a moment she staggered as though she was going to fall; Nancy's strong arm went closely around her.

"Look quickly, dear Aunt Sabrina," Nancy implored.

With trembling fingers Aunt Sabrina opened it—within lay mouldy, age worn bank notes—many of them!

"It must have fallen behind the mantel in that other storm," cried Nancy. Then a great joy shone in her face. "He didn't take it—Anne's grandfather!" she stopped abruptly. But Miss

Sabrina had not even heard her, and Peter was too mystified by the whole thing to think Nancy's words strange. Miss Sabrina turned, with a stricken face.

"Anne—I—I can't think! What—what—wrong—have I done? Oh, God forgive me!" She threw her arms up over her head. Her grief was terrible because it was strange. Even Nancy, frightened, drew away.

"Oh, God, give back the years—" she moaned. "It—is—too—late." She lifted a white, frightened face. "I must—be alone! Don't let anyone disturb me. Tell them (Anne—tell them—everything!)" And with the wallet in her hand she went quickly out of the room.

Nancy turned to Peter, a triumph in her manner that was in strange contrast to Miss Sabrina's sorrow. She held her hand out toward the broken marble.

"What a story!" she cried, "over two generations that ugly old mantel concealed the vindication of a man's honor!" Then, laughing at Peter's puzzled face, she told him briefly the story of the trouble that had hung over Happy House shadowing and emmitting the lives of those beneath the roof.

"And, Peter, it has gone with the storm! Oh, you don't know what that means!" she cried, because Peter could not know that she did not rejoice for herself, but because, now, there need be no barriers between Happy House and her own dear Anne—the real Anne Leavitt.

"After awhile—it will be Happy House," she ended, enigmatically.

She walked with him to the door.

"What a day it has been," she laughed, catching her breath. "I feel as though it had been weeks ago that we started off! I've forgotten how wet we were," she pulled at her blouse. "Run away now, Peter, for I must break the wonderful news to Aunt Milly and B'lindy, and, as B'lindy would say—'there's a pile of work's got to be done!'"

"Nancy, the day isn't over yet!" Peter hesitated. "There's going to be a gorgeous sunset tonight—won't you come into the orchard—just for a little while?"

"Silly—haven't you seen enough of me for one day?"

His look spoke more eloquently than could any words.

"I have something to tell you!" he said, gravely.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### Peter.

Nancy knew, with the instinct of a heart unfamiliar with coquetry, what Peter had to tell her!

She had wanted dreadfully to have to stay away from the orchard—she had hoped that Aunt Milly might need her, but Aunt Milly had gone to bed directly after supper, exhausted by the day's happenings. Aunt Sabrina's door had been shut ever since, with the wallet, she had gone into her room, and from within no sound betrayed her tragedy. B'lindy was fiercely struggling, with mop and broom, to remove all traces of the "curse" from Happy House.

"Now just keep out of my way! I'm that upset," she answered Nancy, shortly.

The sunset was gorgeous. It flooded the garden with a soft, flaming golden light.

Like all girls, Nancy had had her dream of that time when her Knight should come riding to her; like all girls her dream Knight was a pleasantly hazy individual, changing with her changing moods. And she had not wanted him to come quickly. Her young freedom was very precious to her.

One or two others had proposed to Nancy in hot headed, boyish fashion. That had been part of girlhood's fun. One, a junior, after begging her to elope with him, had gone away crushed, and vengeful, only to send her, two weeks later, a bunch of violets and a little note thanking her for her "common sense," explaining that "Pop had threatened to cut his allowance in half unless he settled down and made his midyears."

These had been boys; dear, sentimental, clean hearted boys, but Peter Hyde was different—

not for a moment, until she had seen it in his eyes that afternoon as they sat under the maple tree with B'lindy's lunch spread between them. He had been such a jolly comrade through these weeks at Freedom, he had been so understandable, like Claire and Anne and Daddy! He had never thought she was silly or not grown up enough, he liked children and animals and knew just what to do to make Nonie and Davy happy; he had shared with her his ambitions in his work as though she was a man but, with it all, he was a farmer—his lot had been cast in the narrow confines of Judson's farm and barns and piggery—except for these pleasant days at Happy House she, Nancy Leavitt, with her heart set on a goal as distant as the stars themselves, could have little in common with him.

All this flashed through her mind as she walked slowly, reluctantly toward the orchard—and with it an annoyance that their pleasant comradeship should end this way. So that when, a little later, a very earnest Peter began to tell her in stumbling, awkward words how much her going must mean to him, she wanted to cry out and beg him to stop.

"Nancy—I'm clumsy as the devil. Don't you know what I want to tell you? I can't let you go without knowing it—and—and—Nancy, could you ever—ever love a fellow—like me—enough—to want—to marry him?"

Then the woman's heart within her made Nancy ages old.

"Oh, Peter!" she said with tender compassion. She didn't want to hurt this very dear friend!

"I'm not nearly good enough for you, Nancy, but then, any fellow isn't good enough! And Nancy, there isn't anything in this whole world I wouldn't do—if you cared."

"Oh, Peter!" Why in the world couldn't she stem that flood she knew was coming? Why could she not make him see instantly, how impossible it all was—and say good-bye and go!

"I'll make you happy, Nancy—if loving will do it," he finished humbly.

"Peter—I wish—you hadn't—said this!"

"Do you mean you don't care—a bit?" he cried, protestingly. "Have I frightened you? You said yourself that living one day up here was like weeks somewhere else! Somehow I've not thought of your going away—ever. You seemed such a part of it here. You're so different—from all the girls I've known! You're such a—pal. That's the kind a man needs!"

Nancy was biting her lip to hide its trembling. Over her swept a reverence for this that Peter Hyde was offering her—she knew that a man's pure soul was being bared before her. His awkward words came slowly because they were born of a deep feeling. She was not worthy!

"Oh, Peter! Peter! Please—I'm—I can't let you say all this! I'm not—what you think me! I'm a cheat! You'd hate me if—"

He caught her hand. "I know what you are, Nancy—you're the best, truest, straightest hearted little girl that ever lived!"

With an effort that hurt Nancy pulled herself together. She looked away so that she might not see that it hurt Peter Hyde when she pulled her hand from his close clasp.

"Peter—we must be—sensible." She hated her own words, but something within her, told her that she must say. "We've been jolly comrades—here, but—I'm not cut out for—this sort of life. I'd hate it—after a little; I'd go mad on a farm with just cows and pigs and things around," she caught her breath; "I'm really an awfully selfish girl, Peter, and I've set my heart on my career! I'll always put that before anything—anyone else! That wouldn't be fair—to you. You must forget me and find someone who will help you in your work."

His face was turned from her—his silence frightened her. She tried to make her tone light. "You've been a fine pal, Peter, you've helped me a lot. You've taught me a great many things, too. I've always thought that farmers—and—and—"

He wheeled suddenly.

"Nancy, you haven't said you didn't care for me, any!" he cried.

Nancy flushed in vexation.

"Well, I'm trying to—the best way I know how! I do like you—I'm going to be as honest as I can be! I just couldn't ever—no matter how much I might like the farmer—stand for—for

a farm like Judson's!"

To Nancy's unutterable amazement Peter Hyde commenced to laugh, very softly, with a look in his eyes that caressed her. What an unexplainable creature he was—anyway!

"When my play is produced," Nancy went on, airily, "I shall invite you to come down and sit in a box and see it—and maybe, you'll bring Miss Denny with you!" She wanted to punish him.

But Peter Hyde, the incorrigible, was looking neither crest-fallen nor disheartened. He seized both of Nancy's hands and held them very close.

"I'll come! When that play is produced you can just bet I'll be in the stage box and it won't be Miss Denny that's with me either! You haven't told me, Nancy—that you did not love me! You've just said you didn't like—pigs and cows and hired men and Judson's in general. Dear, I'm not going to let you answer me—now! I'm not even going to say good-bye! You're a tired little girl. If I go, will you promise me to go straight to bed?"

In her astonishment Nancy submitted to the impetuous kiss he pressed against her fingers. When but a few moments before her heart had been torn with pity that she must hurt this man, now he was, in a masterful way, sending her off to bed as though she was a very little girl! And nothing in his tone or manner suggested anything but utter peace of mind and heart.

But Nancy was tired—so very tired that it was pleasant to be led up the path toward the house, to think that someone—even Peter Hyde—cared enough about her to beg her "not to open an eye for 24 hours."

And of course it was because the day had held so much for her that upon reaching her room, she threw herself across her bed and burst into a passion of tears.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### Nancy's Confession.

A thousand torments seemed to rack poor Nancy's tired soul and body. For a long time she had lain, very still, across her bed. Then she had, mechanically, made ready for the night. But sleep would not come. Wider and wider eyed she stared at the dim outline that was her open window. After awhile she crossed to it and knelt down before it, her bare arms folded on the sill.

A sense of remorse, which Nancy had been trying for some time past to keep tucked back somewhere in a corner of her mind, now overwhelmed her. She saw herself a cheat, an imposter. What would these good people of Happy House say of her when they knew all of them, even Peter Hyde—and little Nonie!

Her hands clenched tightly, Nancy faced what she called the reckoning.

Only a few days before she and Aunt Milly had had a long talk. Aunt Milly had told her how, one afternoon, she had tried to walk—and had failed.

"I'd been praying, my dear, that it might be possible. I thought, perhaps, I felt so much better—but the wonderful thing was Nancy—I didn't care! My life seems so full, now, of real things, thanks to all you've done for me, that whether I can walk or not is insignificant. And I shall always have you, anyway, Nancy!" Aunt Milly had said with the yearning look in her eyes that Nancy knew so well.

What would Aunt Milly say when she knew?

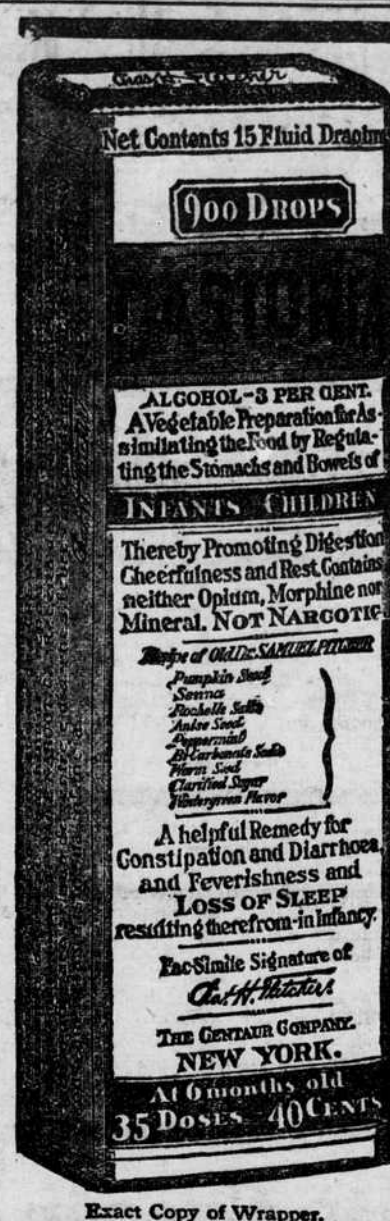
How had she, Nancy, betrayed Sabrina's trust?

Rapidly, as one can at such moments, Nancy's mind went over the weeks of her stay at Happy House. She had let herself go so far; she had taught these people she was deceiving to grow fond of her—to need her!

And she had grown fond of them—that was her punishment. She had grown fond of Happy House; she wanted to be the real Anne Leavitt and belong to Happy House and its precious traditions, that she had mocked; she wanted to have the right to rejoice, now, in the vindication of that brother who had gone away, years before.

Poor little Nancy, shivering there in the chill and silence of the night, her world, her girl's world, fell away from her. Like one looking in from without, she saw her own life as though it was another's—and what it might hold for her! She saw it stripped of the little superficialities of youth; she saw clearly, with uncanny preciseness, causes and effects, the havoc, too, of her own thoughtlessness and weakness.

(To be continued next week.)



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"Oh, your honor, sir," said the laborer, "but he does draw."

"How so, my good man—what does he draw?"

"Why, your worship, he draws the attention of every donkey that passes."—London Tit-Bits.

### Serious Loss Threatened.

Bobby's mother was in a hurry to keep an appointment, and Bobby had all he could do to keep up with her as she went up the street. Finally he called to her and said: "Mother, O mother! You're going to lose something!"

She turned around with rather an embarrassed look and said: "Why, Bobby, what am I losing?"

"You're going to lose your little boy," he answered, "if you don't watch out."

### You're Right, Boss.

"You must get over this habit of extravagance, Boss," said the anxious father. "You don't care how you spend money."

"You're right, daddy; I must," agreed the spendthrift. "Only last night I caught myself offering Mr. Noddie a penny for his thoughts."

### Cuticura Soothes Itching Scalp.

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### A Safe One.

"Yes; he's a fearful bore, isn't he? There's only one good thing about him."

"What's that?"

"His opinion of himself."—London Tit-Bits.

### What Ailed Her Pulse.

Little Louise was recovering from a bit of fever and her appetite had begun to assert itself. She gave a look at the meager slice of toast and the broth that had been brought to her bedside.

"Can't I have more than this, mother?" she asked. "It isn't half enough."

"Just yet," said mother, "I am afraid to give you more. Your pulse is still too quick."

"But, mother," urged Louise, "don't you see it's my excitement because I can't get enough to eat that makes my pulse so quick?"—Exchange.

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### Through Various Ways.

The Indian maiden treads softly in her moccasins; in Holland, it is wooden shoe; in Italy they may be barefoot; in Russia they wear boots; in France you see them in high-heeled slippers; in England they appear in common-sense heels with wide toes; in America it is first one style and then another; but, bless their dear hearts, they are charming howsoever you find them!—Judge.

### Intelligent Teeth.

"Here's an extraordinary coincidence. A pedestrian was struck by a motorist. His false teeth flew out of his mouth and he couldn't find them." "I see nothing so unusual in that." "Wait a moment. The next day that motorist was passing the same spot and the teeth bit a hole in one of his tires."—Birmingham Age-Herald.

### Bird Talk.

"Am I tweet?" twittered she.

"You are tweet," gurgled he.

"Tweet?"

"A fine pair of birds," commented an old bachelor who overheard.—Louisville Courier-Journal.

No man is contented with himself, but some conceal the fact.



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