

HAPPY HOUSE

By Jane D. Abbott

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Something in the vision frightened her, but challenged the best in her, too. One had only one life to live and each wasted day counted so much—each wasted hour cost so dearly! In the striving for the far goal one must not leave undone the little things that lay close at hand, the little, worth while, sometimes hard things. She had gone a long way down the wrong road, but she'd turn squarely! Her head went high—she would make a clean breast of it all—to them all; Aunt Sabrina, Aunt Milly—Peter Hyde.

Her face went down against her arms; she wanted to hide, even in the darkness, the flush that mantled her cheeks. She could see his eyes as they had seemed to caress her—out there in the orchard. Oh, why had she not told him the truth, then and there; if she had he would have despised her, but it would have killed forever the hope she had read in his face.

Nancy, girlishly eager to struggle in life's tide, now, facing the greatest thing in life, shrank back, afraid. She wanted, oh so much, to be little again; there had always been someone, then, to whom to turn when problems pressed—Daddy, even Mrs. Finnegan—the seniors in college, the Dean herself. Now—she felt alone.

Lighting her lamp, she pulled a chair to the table and spread out sheets of paper. She wanted to tell it all, while her courage lasted. She wrote furiously, her lips pressed in a straight line. She would not spare herself one bit—Peter Hyde must know just what she had done.

But, at the end, she yielded to a longing too strong to resist.

"Please, please don't think too badly of me. You see you don't know Arne and how her heart was set on going to Russia, and she was sure that if she told her relatives about going they'd stop her. And that seemed, then, the only important thing—neither of us thought of the wrong we'd be doing the people—here. It seemed, too, a very little thing for me to do for her. But I just can't bear to have you hate me!" For a moment she held her pencil over the last words, then hastily sealed the letter and addressed it.

The last paragraph stayed in her mind. "How silly we were, Anne," she said aloud, mentally arraigning those two very young creatures of college days.

Her confession made, a load rolled from Nancy's heart. "Anyway, he'll know the truth," was her soothing thought as she crawled into bed. In the morning she would tell Aunt Sabrina.

But Nancy's first waking thought—at a very late hour, for her over-tired body had taken its due in sound sleep—was that she was very, very unhappy. As she dressed, with trembling haste, she wondered if she had not better plan to catch the afternoon train at North Hero.

She sought out Jonathan first and dispatched him with her letter, then walked slowly back into the house to face Aunt Sabrina.

On the newel post of the stairs were letters that Jonathan had just brought up from the post-office. One was addressed to her in Anne's familiar handwriting and was postmarked New York!

As though she had been struck, Nancy dropped down on the stairs. Anne's valiant spirit of sacrifice and service had given way to complaint.

"All these weeks couped up in a little room in London waiting for further orders, only to have them dare to tell me—after all the encouragement I'd had—that I was too young and inexperienced to go on into Russia, and that I could be of greater service in organization work back home. Think of it, Nancy! And then shipping me back as though I was a little child. I have worn myself out with disappointment, rage and disgust. I came here to your rooms and slept last night in your bed (as much as any one could sleep with the Finnegan baby cutting a tooth downstairs) and I shall stay here until I can calm down enough to make some definite plans.

"... You've been a dear, Nancy, and I've been quite curious to know how you've gotten on. I never dreamed you'd stay

so long! And now I must ask you to stay just a little longer, until I know what I want to do. Under no circumstances let my aunt know the truth. . . ."

Nancy read the letter three times—she could scarcely believe her eyes. Poor Anne, her splendid dreams had come to nothing.

In her own desire to clean her soul by confession, she had forgotten Anne! Of course she could not tell Aunt Sabrina—at least not now. She must wait, as Anne had asked.

"Oh, what a tangled web we weave when first we practice to deceive," Nancy repeated, bitterly, feeling as though the web she had made was tying her hand and foot.

"Blindly, looking in from the kitchen, saw her. B'indy's face was strangely brightened; she gave a mysterious crook to her finger as she beckoned to Nancy to come into the kitchen.

"I set some coffee for you—I guessed you'd be tucked out after yesterday, ridin' round in that storm and then findin' the wallet was 'nough to tucker anybody." Before she poured the coffee she closed the door leading into the front of the house.

"Miss Nancy, there's been more changes in Happy House even than findin' that wallet!"

"What do you mean, B'indy?"

B'indy leaned a radiant face over Nancy.

"It's Miss Sabriny—she's been just like she was born again! I guess folks won't know her. And you'll never guess what we're goin' to have up here. A baby!"

Nancy was frankly astonished. Then B'indy told her what, in the excitement of the afternoon before, she had not heard—of finding the baby and Davy's note.

"I guess that little mite opened up somethin' that was all dried up in Sabriny Leavitt's heart! Seems while we was all fussin' over the mess in the settin' room Davy Hopworth come up after that baby lookin' like he'd been scared to death. And then this mornin' Sabriny Leavitt comes to me 'n asks me to go down to Timothy Hopkins with her while she asks him for that baby back. Well, we went—she couldn't even wait for me to pick up. And Timothy Hopkins refused her flat! You wouldn't have believed your ears, Nancy, Sabriny Leavitt took most to eryin' and she told him how lonesome it was up to Happy House and how her whole life'd been wasted 'cause she'd never done for others and he'd be doin' a kindness to an old woman to let her take the baby and do for it. But it wa'n't until she'd promised that she'd just sort o' bring him up and he could always go home and play with the nine others, and the nine o' them could come to Happy House's often as they wanted that he'd as much as listen. So we're goin' to have a baby!" B'indy said it with unconcealed triumph. "Cunin' little thing—smart's can be. You should 'a seen it grab for the spoon when I was feedin' it!"

Nancy's eyes were shining. "Oh, that will be wonderful," she cried. "Where is Aunt Sabrina?"

As though in answer to her question, Miss Sabrina's voice called her from the front hall and at the same moment Miss Sabrina opened the door. Yes, it was a transformed Sabrina Leavitt—her face was deeply lined by all she had gone through, but there was a humility in her eyes that softened them and brought a deeper glow as though, indeed, from some new-born spirit within.

Impulsively, Nancy threw two strong arms about her neck and kissed her.

"Come into the sitting room with me, Anne, I have a great deal I want to say to you." She led Nancy through the hall into the sitting room and they sat down together upon the old horse hair sofa. In Miss Sabrina's tone there was a dignified tranquility that made Nancy look at her with a little wonder. As though in answer to Nancy's thought Miss Sabrina said, quietly:

"God alone knows what I've lived through—since yesterday afternoon. Nancy, it is a terrible thing for an old woman to look back upon a life she has wasted—through pride and prejudice. The storm and finding the wallet—that was God's own

way of opening my eyes! I have been a wicked, proud, selfish woman. But I've hurt myself worst of all. For here I am an old woman, and not a soul in the world really loves me—"

Nancy put out a protesting hand. Miss Sabrina patted it.

"I am right, my dear, I know it now. But if God will be good to me He will give me a few more years to live, so that I may make up, in a small way, for the wrong I have done—to others and to myself. Do you know, Nancy, it was you who first brought home to me the truth—that happiness comes as it is given. It was a fortunate thing for Happy House when I brought you here, dear."

Nancy had to bite her lips to strangle the words of confession that sprang to them. Aunt Sabrina went on:

"I cannot bring back the years or atone to my brother for the wrong I did to him. I do not know how I can make up to your own father. Perhaps, if you ask him, to he will forgive me, some day. But I shall, as soon as I can see my lawyers in North Hero, make a new will, leaving Happy House and my share of my father's fortune to you—"

"Good gracious—" thought Nancy; "she thinks Anne's father is still living!" In dismay Nancy sprang to her feet. But Miss Sabrina paid no heed to her agitation. She rose and went to the table and opened a leather bound book that lay there.

"I have brought down some papers and letters that belonged to your grandfather—when he was a young man. Here is a picture of him. Come and see it, my dear."

Unwillingly Nancy crossed to the table. Miss Sabrina reverently placed the faded picture in her hand.

"My only brother," she whispered, brokenly. "Your grandfather."

"No, Anne's grandfather," Nancy almost screamed.

She looked at the picture with intent interest. It portrayed a strikingly handsome young man. She turned the card in her hand. Across the back had been written the name, "Eugene Standbridge Leavitt."

Astounded, Nancy cried out: "Why, that—that is my father's name!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

Eugene Standbridge Leavitt.

For a moment Nancy thought she had gone quite crazy! She put her hand to her head to steady its whirling. This was her grandfather—her own father's father! She was the real Anne Leavitt!

Aunt Sabrina was fussing over a note book in which clippings had been pasted. She thought Nancy's agitation quite excusable; she was trembling herself.

"That is a family name. The Standbridge comes from our great grandfather's side. I knew your father had been called Eugene—yes, here's what B'indy cut out of the newspaper." She placed the open page of the book in Nancy's hands.

She told Nancy how, after the quarrel, her father had ordered her to destroy everything about the house that might remind anyone of the disowned son.

"I carried out his wishes. After our mother's death my father and I had been constant companions. I was terribly angry at my brother for having brought this grief and shame to my father in his old age. Now—" she caught her breath sharply. "But B'indy was fond of the boy. She packed these letters and the picture away, and after that, for years, whenever she'd read anything about him in the papers, or hear a word, she'd enter it in this little book. I never knew that until years later. See—here's an account of his wedding. It says he went abroad—he'd always wanted to, even when he was a young lad. Here it tells that he bought a newspaper. Here's where it speaks about his son Eugene."

It seemed to Nancy as though the little pages of the book, with their age-yellow clippings and curious entries, were opening to her a new side of her father's life. She remembered some stuffed birds in her father's cabinet that she had known in a vague sort of way had come from Africa; it was intensely interesting to read from the little book that "the well known newspaper man, Eugene Leavitt, and his young son, Eugene, had gone on a six months' trip to Africa."

"Milly wrote once to our brother, though I never knew it until I found this book. After a long while he answered with this note. B'indy's was it here,"

turning a page.

The few lines were strangely characteristic of Nancy's own father. They told the younger sister that he'd found the world a very kind and a very good place to live in.

Another letter had been written by Nancy's father. It told, in a boyish, awkward way, of his father's death and that his father, before his death, had asked him to write to the relatives in Freedom and tell them that "there was no hard feeling."

Nancy pondered over this letter for a moment. A great many questions came into her mind. Her father must have inherited from his father a sense of hurt and injustice, or why, through all the years, and years of poverty, too, had he refrained from any mention of the aunts in Freedom?

Like links in a chain the little entries in B'indy's book connected the three generations, for the last clipping told how the young wife of Eugene Leavitt, jr., had been killed in a runaway in Central Park, leaving motherless the little 3-year-old daughter, Anne Leavitt.

"Once Milly told me of finding this. Sometimes she used to wonder what you were like. But I was always angry when she mentioned you—I wanted to feel that I had rooted out all affection for my brother and his kin! As the years went by, though, I grew afraid—what was I going to do with this earthly wealth I possessed? Then I wrote that letter to you in college."

As though it had been but the day before Nancy saw again the beloved dormitory room, old Noah and his letter.

Then the whole truth flashed across her mind! Anne's Aunt Sa—something was the dear little Saphonia Leavitt, who lived with her sister Janie on the lonely road out of Freedom!

With a glee she made no effort to suppress, Nancy caught Aunt Sabrina by the elbows, danced her madly around, and then enveloped her in an impetuous hug. "Oh, you don't know—you can't ever, ever know how nice it all—is," she cried, laughing and wiping away a tear at the same time. "To know that I really, truly belong to you and to Happy House!" Nancy's words rang true. They brought a flood of color to the old woman's cheeks.

"You see I never knew how long I could stay—I was sort of on probation and I love you all so much—now! But, tell me, are those two funny Leavitt sisters any relation of—ours?" Nancy emphasized the last word with a squeeze of Miss Sabrina's hand.

"No—or if they are, it is so far back it's been lost. When I was little I used to see them occasionally, but they've never gone around much. They have always been very poor. They had a brother, but he went away from the Island when he was young—I think he must have died."

"I am going to pretend we're related," declared Nancy, "because I just love them. They took us in during the storm. And—and I have a dear chum, my very best chum, whose name is Anne Leavitt, too, and I am sure they are her aunts." She told Aunt Sabrina, then, in a sketchy way, of her four years friendship with the other Anne Leavitt.

The windows of the sitting room to let out the dust from the storm to let out the dust from the fallen mortar and brick. The blinds had not been closed again. Through the windows streamed a flood of sunshine.

With an impulsive movement Nancy closed the book and laid it down on the table. Her manner said plainly that thus they would dispose of all the past-and-gone Leavitts. She nodded toward the gaping fireplace.

"Let's have a new mantel made with Happy House carved in it, Aunt Sabrina. And, I think, it will be a Happy House, now."

There was a great deal Nancy wanted to tell Aunt Sabrina—of her father, and of their happy life together. But she had suddenly, with consternation, remembered the eloquent confession she had sent off to Peter Hyde.

"And I didn't need to—for I am Anne Leavitt!"

As quickly as she could break away from her aunt, she ran off in search of Jonathan. She found him tying up some of his vines that had been beaten down in the storm.

"Jonathan—that letter I gave you—did you give it to—Mr. Hyde?" she asked with a faint hope that he had not.

(To be continued next week.)

Getting Even.

Elmer Schlesinger, general counsel of the shipping board, said to a Washington correspondent the other day:

"I hate to see a lawyer browbeat, bully or abuse a witness, and when that kind of a lawyer gets taken down, nobody is more pleased than I."

"One day in a shipping board case the lawyer for the other side whacked the rail with his fist and yelled at our witness."

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"The witness gave a shrug. "Why do you ask such foolish questions?" he said."

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The clerical guest was invited to ask the blessing, and the little boy of the house listened nicely until "Amen" was pronounced. Then he said to the minister:

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Detroit, Michigan—"During the Change of Life I had a lot of stomach trouble and was bothered a great deal with hot flashes. Sometimes I was not able to do any work at all. I read about Lydia E. Pinkham's Vegetable Compound in your little book and took it with very good results. I keep house and am able now to do all my own work. I recommend your medicine and am willing for you to publish my testimonial."—Mrs. J. S. LIVERNOIS, 2051 Junction Avenue, Detroit, Mich.

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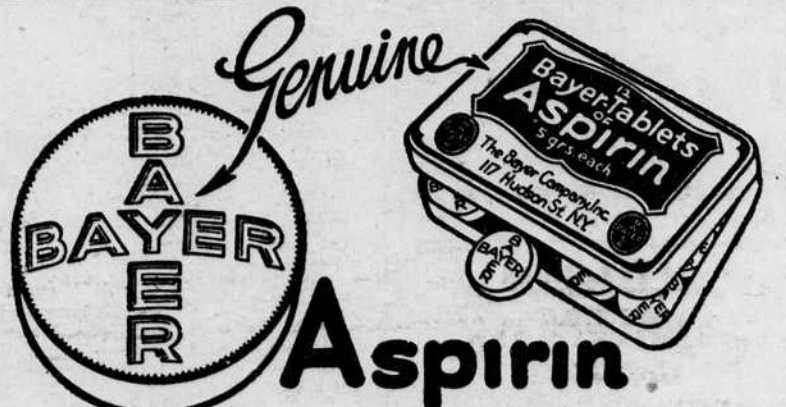
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