

OLD LADY NUMBER 31

by LOUISE FORSSLUND
AUTHOR OF "THE STORY OF SARAH," "THE
SHIP OF DREAMS," ETC. COPYRIGHT BY THE CENTURY CO.

CHAPTER XX—Continued.

His face lightened. The weight of the shock passed. He threw off the awe of the glad news. He smiled the smile of a happy child.

"Naow, mother, we kin buy back our old chair, the rocker with the red roses onto it. Seems ter me them roses must 'a' knowed all the time that this was a-goin' ter happen. They was jest as pert an' sassy that last day—"

Angy laughed. She laughed softly and with unutterable pride in her husband.

"Why, father, don't yer see yew kin buy back the old chair, an' the old place, too, an' then have plenty ter spare?"

"So we kin, mother, so we kin," he nodded his head, surprised. He plunged his hands into his pockets, as if expecting to find them filled with gold. "Wonder ef Sam'l wouldn't lend me a dollar or so in small change. Ef I only had somethin' ter jingle, mebbe I could git closer to this fac'." He drew her to him, and gave her waist a jovial squeeze. "Hy-guy, mother, we're rich! Hain't it splendid?"

Their laughter rang out together—trembling, near-to-tears laughter. The old place, the old chair, the old way, and—plenty! Plenty to mend the shingles. Aye, plenty to rebuild the house, if they chose. Plenty with which to win back the smiles of Angy's garden. The dreadful dream of need, and lack, and want, of feeding at the hand of charity, was gone by.

Plenty! Ah, the goodness and greatness of God! Plenty! Abe wanted to cry it out from the housetops. He wanted all the world to hear. He wished that he might gather his wealth together and drop it piece by piece among the multitude. To give where he had been given, to blossom with abundance where he had withered with penury!

The little wife read his thoughts. "We'll save jest enough fer ourselves ter keep us in comfort the rest of our lives an' bury us decent."

They were quiet a long while, both sitting with bowed heads as if in prayer; but presently Angy raised her face with an exclamation of dismay:

"Don't it beat all, that it happened jest tew late ter git in this week's 'Shoreville Herald'!"

"Tew late?" exclaimed the new-fledged capitalist. "Thar hain't nothin' tew late fer a man with money. We'll hire the editor tew git out another paper, fust thing tomorrow!"

CHAPTER XXI.

"Our Beloved Brother."

The services of the "Shoreville Herald," however, were not required to spread the news. The happiest and proudest couple on Long Island saw their names with the story of their sudden accession to wealth in a great New York daily the very next morning.

A tall, old gentleman with a real "barber's hair cut," a shining, new high hat, a suit of "store clothes" which fitted as if they had been made for him, a pair of fur gloves, and brand-new ten-dollar boots; and a remarkably pretty, old lady in a violet bonnet, a long black velvet cape, with new shoes as well as new kid gloves, and a big silver-fox muff—this was the couple that found the paper spread out on the hall table at the Old Ladies' Home, with the sisters gathered around it, peering at it, weeping over it, laughing, both sorrowing and rejoicing.

"This 'll be good-by ter Brother Abe," Aunt Nancy had sniffed when the news came over the telephone the day before; and though Miss Abigail had assured her that she knew Abe would come to see them real often, the matriarch still failed to be consoled.

"Hain't you noticed, gals," she persisted, "that thar hain't been a death in the house sence we took him in? An' I missed my reg'lar spell o' bronchitis last winter an' this one tew—so fur," she added dismally, and began to cough and lay her hands against her chest. "That was allus the way when I was a young'un," she continued after a while; "I never had a pet dog or cat or even a tame chicken that it didn't up an' run erway sooner or later. This here loss, gals, 'll be the death o' me! Naow, mark my words!"

Then followed a consultation among the younger sisters, the result of which was that they met Abe in the morning with a unanimous petition. They could neither ask nor expect him to remain; that was impossible, but—

"Hip, hooray! Hip, hip, hooray!" cried Abe, waving an imaginary flag

as he entered. "Sam'l dropped us at the gate. Him an' Blossy went on ter see Holmes tew dicker erbout buyin' back the old place. Takes Blossy an' Sam'l tew dew business. They picked out my clothes between them yist'day artemnoon deown ter Injun village, in the Emporium. Haow yew like 'em? Splendid, eh? See my yaller silk handkerchief, tew? We jest dropped in ter git our things. We thought mebbe yew'd want ter slick up the room an' git ready fer the new—"

He was allowed to say no more. The sisters, who had been kissing and hugging Angy one by one, now swooped upon him. He was hugged, too, with warm, generous congratulations, his hands were both shaken until they ached, and his clothes and Angy's silently admired. But no one said a word, for not one of the sisters was able to speak. Angy, thinking that she divined a touch of jealousy, hastened to throw off her wrap and display the familiar old worn silk gown beneath.

"I told Abe I jest wouldn't git a new silk until you each had one made



"Would Yew Ruther Have a New 'Beloved Brother'?"

tew. Blossy sent for the samples. Blossy—"

"All I need's a shroud," interrupted Aunt Nancy grimly.

Angy and Abe both stared at her. She did look gray this morning. She did seem feeble and her cough did sound hollow. The other sisters glanced also at Aunt Nancy, and Sarah Jane took her hand, while she nudged Mrs. Homan with her free elbow and Mrs. Homan nudged Ruby Lee and Ruby Lee glanced at Lazy Daisy and Lazy Daisy drawled out meaningly:

"Miss Abigail!"

Then Miss Abigail, twisting the edge of her apron nervously, spoke:

"Much obliged to you I be in behalf o' all the sisters. Brother Abe an' ter Angy tew. We know yew'll treat us right. We know that yew," resting her eyes on Abe's face, "will prove ter be the 'angel unawares' that we been entertainin', but we don't want yew ter waste yer money on a cartload o' silk dresses. All we ask o' yew is jest enough tew allow us ter advertise fer another brother member ter take yer place."

Who could describe the expression that flashed across Abe's face?—hurt astonishment, wounded pride, jealous incomprehension.

"Ter take my place!" he glanced about the hall defiantly. Who dared to enter there and take his place?—his place!

"This is a old ladies' home," he protested. "What right you got a-takin' in a good-fer-nuthin' old man? Mebbe he'd rob yew er kill yew! When men git ter rampagin', yew can't tell what they might dew."

Sarah Jane nodded her head knowingly, as if to exclaim:

"I told yer so!"

But Miss Abigail hurriedly explained that it was a man and wife that they wanted. She blushed as she added that of course they would not take a man without his wife.

"No, indeed! That'd be highly improper," smirked Ruby Lee.

Then Abe went stamping to the stairway, saying sullenly:

"All right. I'll give yew all the

money yew want ter advertist', an' yew kin say he'll be clothed an' dressed proper, tew, an' supplied with tobacco an' readin' matter besides; but jest wait till the directors read that advertisement! They had me here sorter pertendin' ter be unbeknownst. Come on, Angy. Let's go upstairs an' git our things. Let's—"

Aunt Nancy half arose from her chair, resting her two shaking hands on the arms of it.

"Brother Abe," she called quaveringly after the couple, "I guess yew kin afford ter fix up any objections o' the directors."

Angy pressed her husband's arm as she joined him in the upper hall. "Don't you see, Abe. They don't realize that that poor old gentleman, whoever he may be, won't be yew. They jest know that yew was yew; an' they want ter git another jest as near like yew as they kin."

Abe grunted, yet nevertheless went half-way down stairs again to call more graciously to the sisters that he would give them a reference any time for knowing how to treat a man just right.

"That feller 'll be lucky, gals," he added in tremulous tones. "I hope he'll appreciate yew as I allers done."

Then Abe went to join Angy in the room which the sisters had given to him that bitter day when the cry of his heart had been very like unto:

"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani!"

After all, what was there of his and Angy's here? Their garments they did not need now. They would leave them behind for the other old couple that was to come. There was nothing else but some simple gifts. He took up a pair of red wristlets that Mrs. Homan had knitted, and tucked them in his new overcoat pocket. He also took Abigail's bottle of "Jockey Club" which he had despised so a few days ago, and tucked that in his watch pocket. When he bought himself a watch, he would buy a new clock for the dining-room down stairs, too—a clock with no such asthmatic strike as the present one possessed. All his personal belongings—every one of them gifts—he found room for in his pockets. Angy had even less than he. Yet they had come practically with nothing—and compared with that nothing, what they carried now seemed much. Angy hesitated over the pillow-shams. Did they belong to them or to the new couple to come? Abe gazed at the shams too. They had been given to him and Angy last Christmas by all the sisters. They were white muslin with white cambric frills, and in their centers was embroidered in turkey-red cotton, "Mother," on one pillow, "Father," on the other. Every sister in the Home had taken at least one stitch in the names.

Father and Mother—not Angy and Abe! Why Father and Mother? A year ago no one could have foreseen the fortune, nor have prophesied the possession of the room by another elderly couple.

Angy drew near to Abe, and Abe to Angy. They locked arms and stood looking at the pillows. He saw, and she saw, the going back to the old bedroom in the old home across the woods and over the field—the going back. And in sharp contrast they each recalled the first time that they had stepped beneath that roof nearly half a century ago—the first home-coming—when her mother-heart and his father-heart had been filled with the

hope of children—children to bless their marriage, children to complete their home, children to love, children to feed them with love in return.

"Let's adopt some little folks," said Angy, half in a whisper. "I'm afraid the old place'll seem lonesome without—"

"Might better adopt the sisters," he spoke almost gruffly. "I allers did think young 'uns would be the most comfort tew yew after they grewed up."

"A baby is dretful cunnin'," Angy persisted. "But," she added sadly, "I don't suppose a teethin' mite would find much in common with us."

"Anyway," vowed Abe, suddenly beginning to unfasten the pillow-shams, "these belong ter us, an' I'm a-goin' ter take 'em."

They went down stairs silently, the shams wrapped in a newspaper carried under his arm.

"Waal, naow,"—he tried to speak cheerfully as they rejoined the others, and he pushed his way toward the dining-room—"I'll go an' git my cup an' sasser."

But Miss Abigail blocked the door, again blushing, again confused.

"That 'Tew-our-Beloved-Brother' cup," she said gently, her eyes not meeting the wound in his, "we 'bout concluded yew'd better leave here fer the one what answers the ad. Yew got so much naow, an' him—"

She did not finish. She could not. She felt rather than saw the blazing of Abe's old eyes. Then the fire beneath his brows died out and a mist obscured his sight.

"Gals," he asked humbly, "would yew ruther have a new 'beloved brother'?"

For a space there was no answer. Aunt Nancy's head was bowed in her hands. Lazy Daisy was openly sobbing. Miss Ellie was twisting her fingers nervously in and out—she unwound them to clutch at Angy's arm as if to hold her. At last Miss Abigail spoke with so unaccustomed a sharpness that her voice seemed not her own:

"Sech a foolish question as that nobody in their sound senses would ask."

Abe sat down in his old place at the fireside and smiled a thousand smiles in one. He smiled and rubbed his hands before the blaze. The blaze itself seemed scarcely more bright and warm than the light from within which transfigured his aged face.

"Gals," he chuckled in his old familiar way, "I dunno how Sam'l Darby 'll take it; but if mother's will in, I guess I won't buy back no more of the old place, 'cept'n' jest my rockin'-chair with the red roses onto it; an' all the rest o' this here plagued money I'll hand over ter the directors, an' stay right here an' take my comfort."

Angy bent down and whispered in his ear: "I'd ruther dew it, tew, father. Anythin' else would seem like goin' a-visitin'. But yew don't want ter go an' blame me," she added anxiously, "ef yew git all riled up an' sick abed ag'in."

"Pshaw, mother," he protested; "yew fergit I was adopted then, naow I be adoptin'. Thar's a big difference."

She lifted her face, relieved, and smiled into the relieved and radiant faces of Abe's "children," and her own.

(THE END.)



YEAR'S SUPPLY OF BABIES

Facts Compiled by Statistician Will Come to Many as Something of a Surprise.

It has been computed that about 36,000,000 babies are born into the world each year. The rate of production is therefore about 70 per minute, or more than one for every beat of the clock.

With the one-a-second calculation every reader is familiar, but it is not every one who stops to calculate what this means when it comes to a year's supply. It will, therefore, probably startle a good many persons to find, on the authority of a well-known statistician, that, could the infants of a year be ranged in a line in cradles, the cradles would extend around the globe.

The same writer looks at the matter in a more picturesque light. He imagines the babies being carried past a given point in their mother's arms, one by one, and the procession being kept up night and day until the last hour in the twelfth month had passed by. A sufficiently liberal rate is allowed, but even in going past at the rate of 20 a minute, 1,200 an hour, during the entire year, the reviewer at his post would have seen only the sixth part of the infantile host.

In other words, the babe that had to be carried when the tramp began would be able to walk when but a

mere fraction of its comrades had reached the reviewer's post, and when the year's supply of babies was drawing to a close there would be a rear guard, not of infants, but of romping six-year-old boys and girls.

Shot Husband, Not Bird.

Hidden from view while at work in a tree, Frederick F. Seidel of Stony Point, N. Y., was accidentally shot in both legs by his wife, Mrs. Marie Seidel, as she fired at a woodpecker.

The bird was in the habit of mounting a limb near her bedroom window at daylight and hammering until it awoke her and she chased it away.

She got a shotgun when she heard the bird. Failing to see her husband sawing a limb in an adjoining tree, she fired, and riddled both of his legs. He fell 18 feet to the ground, breaking his right arm.

Home Rule for Bathing Suits.

Home rule is a jewel. We appreciate it when we observe the spots where we haven't it. The power of the war department over the lake front, which has been used so frequently for the benefit of special privilege and to the detriment of the people of Chicago, now seeks to decide for us whether the bathing costumes on our beaches are decent. Of course, this is none of the war department's business. It would simply be sticking to the Democratic doctrine of "states' rights" if it flatly admitted it.—Chicago Post.

AVOID INDIGESTION

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Use for Anthologies.

The mistake is in thinking that all poetry is for all readers. On the contrary the realm of poetry is as wide as the world, for the very reason that each man may find there just what he needs and leave the rest. The thing is to discover the poetry that was meant for us, and perhaps the best way to do that is to turn over the pages of some well-made selection, and see where our eyes get caught and held.—Richard Le Gallienne.

Constipation causes many serious diseases. It is thoroughly cured by Doctor Pierce's Pleasant Pellets. One a laxative, three for cathartic.

The Vast World.

A student of Erfurt, desiring to see Nuremberg, departed with a friend on a journey thither. Before they had walked half a mile, he asked his companion whether they should soon get to Nuremberg, and was answered: "Tis scarce likely, since we have only just left Erfurt." Having repeated the question another half mile farther on, and getting the same answer, he said: "Let's give up the journey and go back, since the world's so vast!"—Luther's "Table Talk."

Got His Answer.

He—"Why are you women always going to bargain sales in the hope of getting something for nothing?" She—"For the same reason you men are always going to your poker clubs."—Dallas News.

Some Indication.

Mary—"I'm positive Fred loves me and intends to make me his wife." Helen—"Why? Has he proposed yet?" Mary—"No; but he dislikes mother more every time he sees her."—Liverpool Mercury.



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