AUNT SOPHIA'S JOURNAL

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I was flabbergasted and just plain shocked, and while I stared at the papers in my hands trying to convince myself of the reality of what I had just read, I told myself over and over that, yes, it was true: I, Jeremy Edwin Eberly, was heir and sole inheritor/possessor of the estate of the late Sophia Hannah Brooks Cranston.
I scrutinized the papers again, closing my eyes and even rubbing them to make sure that I was wide awake and that I was not dreaming. Then I calmly folded the papers and put them back in the envelope in which they had arrived. It was a for-real fact, I finally realized as I noted the attorney's name and address in the upper left hand corner of the envelope.

It was almost more than I could take in. I felt limp with elation and surprise. Me? Why had Aunt Sophia singled me out and not divided her estate among, with, or between all six of her nephews and nieces? Frankly, this puzzled me and set my mind in a dizzy whir and whirl of questions.

Not that Aunt Sophia's estate was of such great worth; it wasn't. She owned a neat little three-bedroom house which her late husband, my Uncle Harvey, had built for her twenty or so years after they were married. (Uncle Harvey was my mother's brother.) Four or five acres of land surrounded the house; besides that, there was nothing. Still, it did have value, as such.

I was glad I didn't need to work until the next day; I'm afraid my mind would not have functioned well on the job. You see, you'd have had to know my Aunt Sophia to understand why I couldn't figure this puzzling turn of events out. She was always such a quietly-shy and deep thinking person who kept you wondering what she was thinking about.

Aunt Sophia was, well . . . she was Aunt Sophia. Uncle Harvey adored her. For nearly fifty-two years she was the sweetheart of his life. Truth of the matter is, Aunt Sophia was the only girl he ever loved and, as he often said, she was the only girl he ever dated. Or cared to date. And I guess, from things Aunt Sophia would occasionally let slip -- from her quiet, closed-up, shut-in self -- my Uncle Harvey was the sweetheart of her entire life also. They had a good marriage. This was without any doubt or question.

Aunt Sophia had an only sister, Agatha by name. Now, under ordinary circumstances and by all standards of normal family living, one would suppose that said sisters would be closer than the proverbial two peas in a pod. But such was not the case. I mean, for so long as I can remember, it was not the case. If one went to a family gathering, the other stayed home, and vice versa. It was a case of "Never the twain dare meet." To me, it was sad. Worse still, it was not Christlike.
Aunt Sophia was a dainty, fair-skinned little woman who was always extremely kind and gentle with me and to me and, once, when I asked if she ever went to see Agatha, she told me curtly and bluntly that I must never ask that question of her again.

I apologized sincerely and profusely and told her I was sorry I had broached the subject. However, from that time on, I knew that my aunt and her sister had trouble. Serious trouble. And that's when I began praying earnestly for Aunt Sophia and her sister. Heaven had no place in its holy, pure, and righteous atmosphere and dominion for any who had strife and enmity in their hearts.

I loved my aunt, and the thought of her losing her soul and burning forever in the lake of fire drove me often to my knees. Whatever had brought on her bitterness and her profound hatred for and toward her sister, I hadn't the slightest hint of what it was. And for this I was thankful, since, not knowing, I could pray freely for both my aunt and Agatha I'd just remind the Lord that He knew what it was all about and that He should please work accordingly.

And now she was dead. And buried. And the big business envelope in my hands carried the news that I was Aunt Sophia's heir. Why me? I wondered again, dreading the time when the other nephews and nieces would hear about it. And, sooner or later, I knew they would hear.

I was not yet quite twenty, working full time during the summer months and only part time during the fall, winter and early spring months when I went to the college in our hometown, studying business administration.

Aunt Sophia's house was situated a short distance away from ours, at the extreme northwest end of town. Since neither Father nor Mother was home, I decided to run down to the lawyer's office, pick up the keys to the house and take a quick run out to the place.

It was quietly-restful when I stepped out of the car and walked the short piece to the gate, over which a yellow rose climbed on a rose arbor. Aunt Sophia loved flowers. All kinds of flowers. Lots of flowers. Uncle Harvey saw to it that she had all she desired, giving her free rein to his purse strings for obtaining and purchasing them. The place was a showcase of exquisite color.
and beauty from early spring until the snows of November covered and buried the last of the fall flowers.

I stood in mute silence and awe as the significance of this inheritance sank into my being. Labor -- hard, untiring labor, had produced what my eyes were now taking in and suddenly I felt little and undeserving. If I could only be sure that Aunt Sophia had gotten things settled between herself and Agatha and that she was in Heaven, I would be able to feel better about the whole thing. But not knowing where she had gone gave me an uneasy feeling and troubled my thoughts no end. How would I ever be able to enjoy what was now rightfully mine by inheritance when my aunt may have missed making it into the Beautiful, Eternal City of God? And all because of . . . well, because of what?

I brushed sad tears from my eyes then turned the key in the door and walked inside. Everything was just as I had always seen and remembered Aunt Sophia's and Uncle Harvey's house -- in neat order and in tip-top shape. And the place still retained its own distinctive and sweetly-fragrant odor. Always, Aunt Sophia's house smelled clean and as delightfully fragrant as lavender. But then, coming to think of it, she'd always grown her own lavender in one of the big flower beds on the back lawn and, come fall, the lavender was cut and hung upside-down to dry and then used as a fragrance in the house.

I closed the door quietly behind me, feeling almost like a trespasser as I walked from room to room. Everything was so very familiar but, in the absence of those I loved, so unfamiliar, too. I thought I had to hear Aunt Sophia's voice, hear her telling me to sit down while she brought me "a wee bite to eat." (Always, she was hospitable and wanting to share and give) I missed the jolly, booming voice of Uncle Harvey and his smile producing laughter.

The house was too silent and still. Tears stung my eyes. I missed the voices of those once so familiar and dear to me. Everything was the same -- the inanimate objects, I mean--but all was somehow different: it took people to make a house a home, I realized suddenly.

I walked into Aunt Sophia's bedroom and looked around. Nothing had changed and yet everything was changed because of her absence. And where, where, where was this little, once tidy-clean wisp of a woman whose
usually always reined in tongue, when let loose and incensed to "its breaking point" (her words), could cut and slash like a sharp two-edged sword? Oh, where was she? Uncle Harvey had made a joyously-wonderful landing ere he drew his final breath; but my aunt . . . where was she?

I dropped down into one of the small rockers in the room and buried my face in my hands as the tears rolled and tumbled down my cheeks in wild confusion. Then I spied the trunk. It had been Uncle Harvey's, I remembered. An old steamer trunk.

Slipping to my knees, I released the catch and opened the lid. For so long as I could remember, the old trunk had fascinated me. As a boy, it had afforded me many a pleasant and extremely exciting daydreaming adventure -- I was a brave, seafaring man; a captain, if you please! The trunk was loaded with gold and silver and all sorts of valuables, found and "rescued" from long-lost-buried-at-sea vessels of a rich king, that sort of exciting daydreaming.

I had never seen inside the trunk before. Was it any wonder that I was excited! True, the fanciful, far-fetched dreams of my boyhood years were nothing more now than mere vaguely-pleasant memories, still the excitement of actually getting a look inside sent my heart to throbbing and hammering wildly.

Gently, almost reverently, I picked up the first thing I saw when I opened the lid; it was on top of everything else. A journal! Was it Uncle Harvey's? I wondered, recalling some extremely exciting accounts I'd listened to of his days at sea I hoped it was his.

With a trembly, tingling feeling, I opened the book. To my surprise, I discovered the journal was not Uncle Harvey's at all but was, instead, Aunt Sophia's. Now what would a childless woman have to write about, I wondered; especially, when she was pretty much a homebody who loved best of all to keep her husband happy and to tend her flowers.

In a wave of disappointment I closed the book. Then my curiosity gained the ascendancy and I opened it again, wondering just what day by day happenings she deemed memorable enough to record in a thing called a journal. Now Uncle Harvey, yes, but Aunt Sophia . . so quiet and shy!
I felt more than ever like a trespasser or, even like a snooper. I was brought up from my earliest years to never, never pry into others' affairs, and for a brief moment a feeling of shame and guilt washed over me. Then I remembered that, rightfully, it now belonged to me. So I began reading.

I wasn't far into the first few pages of the journal until I was totally and completely caught up with the day by day happenings of my aunt, and suddenly I knew I could not lay the journal down until I had read it through. The revelation was an eye-opener to me, and while I knew my aunt's attitude and her feelings toward her sister were anything but Christlike, I was given a keen insight into the whys and the wherefores of her behavior toward Agatha.

More than once, as I read, I had to pause to wipe fast-falling tears from my eyes and face. And when I came to a page midway through the journal and began to read, I gasped. There, before my eyes was the reason for Aunt Sophia's bitterness and, yes, the hatred for her only sister, older than my aunt by three years and some few months.

Again I gasped as I read the account, and the full realization of what had happened unfolded before me like it was projected on a screen in bold and true-to-life happening.

"Money!" I exclaimed fiercely. "The love of money. . .!"

Tears flowed again. I was crying for my dear departed aunt. Crying out of pity and compassion for how wrongly Agatha had treated her. All her life. Behind her parents' back; never when they were around. Never. Agatha, the conniver, the schemer, the falsifier, and, ultimately, the cheater/supplanter.

How I wished I could see Aunt Sophia again, and could wrap my arms around her one more time and tell her how much I loved her, and hear her say to me-again -- "And Jeremy boy, I love you too. Of all my nieces and nephews, you alone tell me you love me. You are a dear, good boy. I believe in you. You love the Lord."

"Aunt Sophia!" I cried, as I leaned my face against the journal. "Oh, my dear, dear Aunt Sophia, I love you. But your bitterness. . . ."

I stopped abruptly. It was too late. Too late. If only my dear aunt could have realized that bitterness in one's soul affects most bitterly those who are
obsessed and possessed by it. That its venom and poison inflicts most those who refuse to be emptied, cleaned out and purged from it -- by the power of the Holy Spirit.

Inwardly, I groaned. My dear, dear Aunt Sophia, badgered, cowed, hated, made fun of, despised and, finally, cheated out of her share of the inheritance because of the grasping, selfish Agatha. And now, unless she had repented, confessed and forgiven Agatha and was, herself, forgiven through Jesus' blood, her eternal punishment was worse by far than anything she had endured (in complete and total silence) from Agatha.

A sudden yearning desire overwhelmed me. I had to know the end of all my dear aunt's writings. I had to! It was sad, sad, to learn that, due to the scheming, shrewdly-planning, lying and convincing tongue of Agatha, one's aged parents, no longer responsible for their actions, had inadvertently but completely cut their other, much-loved, younger daughter out of their inheritance.

Placing a piece of paper between the pages where I had left off reading the revelatory account of my aunt having been cheated out of her just share of the inheritance, I turned quickly toward the back of the journal and began reading. What I read there made my heart leap wildly:

"Since Harvey's passing," it stated, "the Almighty has been dealing mightily with me. My heart is softening. Softening! I am aware of the fact that if I ever want to see my beloved one again, and be with him -- he who knew and shared all the trauma, the hurts and the heart, break of my life -- I must change. I must! Oh my God, help me! Help me! I'm trying. Change me!"

I couldn't resist the urge to skip several pages. "Today," she had written, "marks a brand new beginning for me. At four this morning, while on my knees in search of God, He slipped sweetly, quietly, and wonderfully into my soul. I am saved. Converted! Washed in the blood of the Lamb. Harvey, my dearest, I will join you soon.

"I tried to contact Agatha again to make amends on my part but had no results. (This is the fourth such attempt I have made.) Always, who it is that answers her phone, tells me she wants nothing to do with me."
I wanted to run like the wind and shout at the top of my lungs; I was in an ecstasy of joy. My aunt, my dear Aunt Sophia, was in Heaven! Little matter about anything else; she was Home! Safely Home!

Laying the journal down, I doubled over with holy laughter and praises to the Lord. Talk about an inheritance! Aunt Sophia was, this very minute, reveling in an inheritance of such exquisite glory and beauty as could not be described And Agatha could never take it away from her. Never!