



THE HEART OF HAPPY HOLLOW

by

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**Chapter 11: The Triumph of Ol' Mis'
Pease**

Between the two women, the feud began in this way: When Ann Pease divorced her handsome but profligate spouse, William, Nancy Rogers had, with reprehensible haste, taken him for better or for worse. Of course, it proved for worse, but Ann Pease had never forgiven her.

”Pears lak to me,” she said, “dat she was des a–waitin’ fu’ to step inter my shoes, no mattah how I got outen ‘em, whethah I died or divo’ced.”

It was in the hey–day of Nancy Rogers’ youth, and she was still hot–tempered, so she retorted that “Ann Pease sut’ny did unmind huh’ o’ de dawg in de mangah.” The friends of the two women took sides, and a war began which waged hotly between them—a war which for the first few weeks threatened the unity of Mt. Pisgah Church.

But the church in all times has been something of a selfish institution and has known how to take care of itself. Now, Mt. Pisgah, of necessity, must recognise divorce, and of equal necessity, re–marriage. So when the Rev. Isaiah Johnson had been appealed to, he had spread his fat hands, closed his eyes and said solemnly, “Whom God hath j’ined, let no man put asundah;” peace, or at best, apparent peace, settled upon the troubled waters.

The solidity of Mt. Pisgah was assured, the two factions again spoke to each other, both gave collections on the same Sunday; but between the two principals there was no abatement of their relentless animosity.

Ann Pease as it happened was a “puffessor,” while the new Mrs. Pease was out of the fold; a gay, frivolous person who had never sought or found grace. She laughed when a black wag said of the two that “they might bofe be ‘peas,’ but dey wasn’t out o’ de same pod.” But on its being repeated to Sister Pease, she resented it with Christian indignation, sniffed and remarked that “Ef Wi’yum choosed to pick out one o’ de onregenerate an’ hang huh ez a millstone erroun’ his neck, it wasn’t none

o' huh bus'ness what happened to him w'en dey pulled up de tares f'om de wheat."

There were some ultra-malicious ones who said that Sister Pease, seeing her former husband in the possession of another, had begun to regret her step, for the unregenerate William was good-looking after all, and the "times" that he and his equally sinful wife had together were the wonder and disgust, the envy and horror of the whole community, who watched them with varying moods of eagerness.

Sister Ann Pease went her way apparently undisturbed. Religion has an arrogance of its own, and when at the end of the year the good widow remained unmarried she could toss her head, go her way, and look down from a far height upon the "po' sinnahs"; indeed, she had rather the better of her frailer sister in the sympathies of the people.

As one sister feelingly remarked, "Dat ooman des baihin' dat man in huh prayahs, an' I 'low she'll mou'n him into glory yit."

One year of married life disillusion, and defiant gaiety cannot live upon itself when admiration fails. There is no reward in being daring when courage becomes commonplace. The year darkened to winter, and bloomed to spring again. The willows feathered along the river banks, and the horse-chestnuts budded and burst into beautiful life. Then came summer, rejoicing, with arms full of flowers, and autumn with lap full of apples and grain, then winter again, and all through the days Nancy danced and was gay, but there was a wistfulness in her eyes, and the tug of the baby no longer drew her heart. She had come to be "Wi'yum's Nancy," while the other, *that* other was still "Sister Pease," who sat above her in the high places of the people's hearts.

And then, oh, blessedness of the winter, the revival came; and both she and William, strangely stricken together with the realisation of their sins, fell at the mercy seat.

“There is more joy over one sinner that repenteth,” —but when Will and Nancy both “came through” on the same night—well, Mt. Pisgah’s walls know the story.

There was triumph in Nancy’s face as she proclaimed her conversion, and the first person she made for was Sister Pease. She shook her hands and embraced her, crying ever aloud between the vociferations of the congregation, “Oh, sistah, he’p me praise Him, he’p me praise Him,” and the elder woman in the cause caught the infection of the moment and joined in the general shout.

Afterwards she was not pleased with herself. But then if she hadn’t shouted, wouldn’t it have been worse?

The Rev. Isaiah was nothing if not dramatic in his tendencies, and on the day when he was to receive William and Nancy Pease into full membership with the church, it struck him that nothing could make upon his congregation a profounder impression for good than to have the two new Peases joined by the elder one, or as the wag would have put it, all in one pod. And it was so ordered, and the thing was done.

It is true that the preacher had to labour some with Sister Ann Pease, but when he showed her how it was her Christian duty, and if she failed of it her rival must advance before her in public opinion, she acquiesced. It was an easier matter with “Sister Wi’yum Pease.” She agreed readily, for she was filled with condescending humility, which on every occasion she took the opportunity of displaying toward her rival.

The Rev. Isaiah Johnson only made one mistake in his diplomatic manœuvring. That was when he whispered to Sister Ann Pease, “Didn’t I tell you? Des see how easy Sister Wi’yum give in.” He was near to losing his cause and the wind was completely taken out of his sails when the widow replied with a snort, “Give in, my Lawd! Dat ooman’s got a right to give in; ain’t she got ‘uligion an’ de man, too?”

However, the storm blew over, and by the time service was begun they were all seated together on a front bench, Sister Nancy, William, and Sister Ann.

Now was the psychological moment, and after a soul-stirring hymn the preacher rose and announced his text—"Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity."

Someone in the back part of the church suggested trinity as a substitute and started a titter, but the preacher had already got his dramatic momentum, and was sweeping along in a tumultuous tide of oratory. Right at his three victims did he aim his fiery eloquence, and ever and again he came back to his theme, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity," even though Ann Pease had turned her back on William, whose head was low bowed, and Nancy was ostentatiously weeping into a yellow silk handkerchief.

The sermon spurred on to a tempestuous close, and then came the climax when the doors of the church were opened. William and Nancy immediately went up to end their probation, and after a few whispered remarks the minister shook hands with each of them, then raising his voice he said: "Now, brothahs and sistahs, befo' you all gives dese lambs de right han' o' fellowship to welcome dem to de fol', I want Sister Ann Pease to come up an' be de first to bid 'em God speed on the gospel way." Ann Pease visibly swelled, but she marched up, and without looking at either, shook hands with each of her enemies.

"Hallelujah, praise de Lord," shouted the preacher, clapping his hands, "Behold how good and how pleasant it is; and now let the congregation in ginerel come aroun' and welcome Brothah and Sistah Pease."

His rich bass voice broke into "Bless Be the Tie that Binds," and as the volume of the hymn, swelled by the full chorus of the congregation, rolled away to the rafters of the little church, the people rose and

marched solemnly round, shaking hands with the new members and with each other.

Brother and Sister Pease were the last to leave church that day, but they found Ann waiting for them at the door. She walked straight up to them and spoke: “Nancy Rogers,” she said, “I know you; I kin see claih thoo you, and you ain’t a foolin’ me one bit. All I got to say is dat I has done my Christian duty, an’ I ain’t gwine do no mo’, so don’ you speak to me fo’ m dis day out.”

For the brief space of a second there was something like a gleam in Nancy’s eyes, but she replied in all meekness, “I’s a full-blown Christian now, an’ I feel it my bounden duty to speak to you, Sis’ Pease, an’ I’s gwine t’ speak.”

Ignoring this defiance the other woman turned to her former husband. She looked at him with unveiled contempt, then she said slowly, “An’ ez fu’ Wi’yum, Gawd he’p you.”

Here all intercourse between these warring spirits might have ended but for Nancy Pease’s persistent civility. She would speak to her rival on every occasion, and even call upon her if she could gain admittance to the house. And now the last drop of bitterness fell into the widow’s cup, for the community, to distinguish between them, began calling her “Ol’ Sis’ Pease.” This was the climax of her sorrows, and she who had been so devout came no more to the church; she who had been so cheerful and companionable grew morose and sour and shut her doors against her friends. She was as one dead to her old world. The one bit of vivid life about her was her lasting hatred of the woman who bore her name. In vain the preacher sought to break down the barrier of her animosity. She had built it of adamant, and his was a losing fight. So for several years the feud went on, and those who had known Ann in her cheerier days forgot that knowledge and spoke of her with open aversion as “dat awful ol’ Mis’ Pease.” The while Nancy, in spite of “Wi’yum’s” industrial

vagaries, had flourished and waxed opulent. She continued to flaunt her Christian humility in the eyes of her own circle, and to withhold her pity from the poor, lonely old woman whom hate had made bitter and to whom the world, after all, had not been over-kind. But prosperity is usually cruel, and one needs the prick of the thorn one's self to know how it stings his brother.

She was startled one day, however, out of her usual placidity. Sister Martin, one of her neighbours, dropped in and settling herself with a sigh announced the important news, "Well, bless Gawd, ol' Sis' Pease is gone at last."

Nancy dropped the plate she had been polishing, and unheeded, it smashed into bits on the floor.

"Wha' — what!" she exclaimed.

"Yes'm," Sister Martin assured her, "de ol' lady done passed away."

"I didn't know she was sick; w'en she die?"

"She done shet huh eyes on dis worl' o' sorrow des a few minutes ago. She ain't bin sick mo'n two days."

Nancy had come to herself now, and casting her eyes up in an excess of Christian zeal, she said: "Well, she wouldn't let me do nuffin' fu' huh in life, but I sut'ny shell try to do my duty by huh in death," and drying her hands and throwing a shawl over her head, she hastened over to her dead enemy's house.

The news had spread quickly and the neighbourhood had just begun to gather in the little room which held the rigid form. Nancy entered and made her way through the group about the bed, waving the others aside imperiously.

“It is my Christian duty,” she said solemnly, “to lay Sis’ Pease out, an’ I’s gwine do it.” She bent over the bed. Now there are a dozen truthful women who will vouch for the truth of what happened. When Nancy leaned over the bed, as if in obedience to the power of an electric shock, the corpse’s eyes flew open, Ann Pease rose up in bed and pointing a trembling finger at her frightened namesake exclaimed: “Go ‘way f’om me, Nancy Rogers, don’t you daih to tech me. You ain’t got de come-uppance of me yit. Don’t you daih to lay me out.”

Most of this remark, it seems, fell on empty air, for the room was cleared in a twinkling. Women holding high numerous skirts over their heavy shoes fled in a panic, and close in their wake panted Nancy Pease.

There have been conflicting stories about the matter, but there are those who maintain that after having delivered her ultimatum, old Mis’ Pease immediately resumed the natural condition of a dead person. In fact there was no one there to see, and the old lady did not really die until night, and when they found her, there was a smile of triumph on her face.

Nancy did not help to lay her out.