



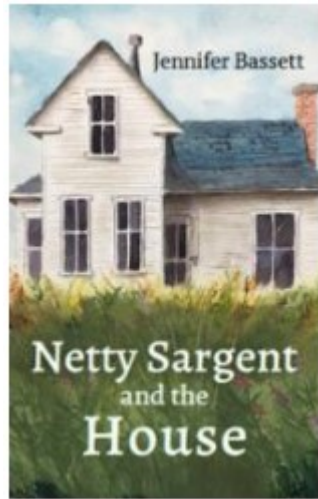
Learn English Through Stories.

A2 Stories

Elementary Plus Level

**Adapted and modified by
Kulwant Singh Sandhu.**

<https://learn-by-reading.co.uk>



Netty Sargent and the House

By Jennifer Bassett

Netty Sargent lived with her uncle in that lonely house just outside the grounds of the squire's big house. She was a tall young woman, with black hair and dancing eyes. And she had a little laughing smile that sent all the young men wild.

All the young men of that time were after her, but in the end she decided that Jasper Cliff was her favourite. He was good-looking, but he only ever thought about himself, not other people. But Netty wanted Jasper, and none of the others. Jasper liked Netty too, but he was more interested in her uncle's house.

The house was built by Netty's great-great-grandfather, and had a garden and a little field next to it. But it was a leasehold house, because the ground belonged to the squire.

'And what happens,' Jasper asked Netty one day, 'when your uncle dies?'

'The house, garden and field will go back to the squire,' said Netty. 'But if Uncle pays a few pounds, he can renew the leasehold and put another name on it. Then the squire can't get the house back until that person dies.'

'And what is your uncle going to do?' asked Jasper.

'Oh, he's going to renew the leasehold, and put my name on it. He told me that months ago.'

Netty Sargent and the House

Netty Sargent lived with her uncle in that lonely house just outside the grounds of the squire's big house. She was a tall young woman, with black hair and dancing eyes. And she had a little laughing smile that sent all the young men wild.

All the young men of that time were after her, but in the end she decided that Jasper Cliff was her favourite. He was good-looking, but he only ever thought about himself, not other people. But Netty wanted Jasper, and none of the others. Jasper liked Netty too, but he was more interested in her uncle's house.

The house was built by Netty's great-great-grandfather, and had a garden and a little field next to it. But it was a leasehold house, because the ground belonged to the squire.

'And what happens,' Jasper asked Netty one day, 'when your uncle dies?'

'The house, garden and field will go back to the squire,' said Netty. 'But if Uncle pays a few pounds, he can renew the leasehold and put another name on it. Then the squire can't get the house back until that person dies.'

'And what is your uncle going to do?' asked Jasper.

'Oh, he's going to renew the leasehold, and put my name on it. He told me that months ago.'

Netty's uncle knew that it was important to renew the leasehold, because the squire was very anxious to get the house back. The squire didn't like all those little leaseholds on his ground, and he wanted to pull the house down and make it all nice and tidy.

Netty's uncle knew this very well - but he still didn't renew the leasehold. He didn't like Jasper Cliff, so perhaps he didn't like to think of Jasper marrying Netty and living in the house when he was dead.

Every week Jasper asked Netty about the leasehold, and Netty asked her uncle, and her uncle said, 'I'll go and see the squire's agent next week.' But still nothing happened.

At last old Mr Sargent fell ill, and Jasper got tired of waiting.

'Why doesn't your uncle do it?' he asked Netty. 'I tell you, if you lose the house and ground, I won't marry you. And there's an end of it.'

Poor Netty hurried indoors to talk to her uncle.

'Please do something, Uncle!' she said. 'If I don't get the house, I won't get a husband!'

'And you must have Jasper, must you, my dear?'

'Yes, Uncle, I must!'

Old Sargent didn't want to make Netty unhappy, so he asked for a meeting with the squire's agent. The squire was very cross when he heard this. He was hoping that old Sargent would die and the leasehold would come to an end.

But he had to agree to renew the leasehold if Sargent paid the money. So the squire's agent got the new papers ready for old Sargent to sign.

By now Netty's uncle was really ill, and couldn't leave the house. The agent agreed to visit him. 'I'll come at five o'clock on Monday,' he told Netty, 'and Mr Sargent can pay the money and sign the papers then.'

At three o'clock on that Monday Netty brought her uncle a cup of tea. When she came in the room, her uncle gave a little cry and fell forward in his chair. Netty ran to him, but he could not speak or move. And in a few minutes, she saw that his face and hands were cold and white. He was dead, stone-cold dead.

Netty was very unhappy. 'Why didn't he live two more hours?' she thought. 'Now I've lost everything - house, garden, field, and a home for myself and my lover. What am I going to do now?'

Then, suddenly, she knew what she had to do. It was a dark December afternoon, which was very helpful for her. First, she locked the front door. Then she moved her uncle's table in front of the fire. Her uncle's body was still in his chair, which was a big old chair on wheels. So she pushed the chair, with her uncle in it, to the table, putting the chair with its back half-turned to the window.

On the table she put the large family Bible open in front of him, and put his finger on the page. Then she opened his eyes a little, and put his glasses on his nose. When it got dark, she lit a candle and put it on the table beside the Bible. Then she unlocked the door, and sat down to wait.

When she heard the agent's knock at five o'clock, she hurried to the door.

'I'm sorry, sir,' she whispered, 'Uncle's so ill tonight. I'm afraid he can't see you.'

The agent was not very pleased. 'So I've come out all this way for nothing, have I?'

'Oh, no, sir, I hope not,' said Netty. 'We can do the business about the leasehold, can't we?'

'Of course not. He must pay the money, and sign the leasehold papers in front of me. I have to be a witness.'

Netty looked worried. 'Uncle is so afraid of business things like this. His hands were shaking when I told him that you were coming today.'

'Poor old man - I'm sorry for him,' said the agent. 'But he must sign the papers, and I must be a witness.'

'Yes, I understand that, sir,' said Netty. She thought for a minute. 'You have to see him. But can you still be a witness, sir, if he doesn't see you?'

'How do you mean, girl?' said the agent.

'Come with me a minute,' she said.

She took him into the garden and round to the window.

Inside, the agent could see, at the other end of the room, the back and side of the old man's head, and his arm. He could see the glasses on his nose, and the book and the candle on the table.

'He's reading his Bible, sir,' said Netty, in her softest, sweetest voice.

'Yes, I see that,' said the agent. 'But nobody ever sees him in church, do they?'

'No, but he loves his Bible,' said Netty. 'I think he's sleeping a little at the moment, but that's not surprising in an old man, who's so unwell. Now, sir, can you stand here at the window and watch him sign the papers? Then he won't see you, and he won't be worried and unhappy about it all. Can you do that for him, sir?'

'Very well,' said the agent. He took out a cigar, lit it, and began to smoke. 'Have you got the money ready?'

'Yes,' said Netty. 'I'll bring it out.' She hurried inside, and brought out the money. The agent counted it, then gave Netty the leasehold papers.

'Uncle's hand is very shaky now,' she said. 'And he's so sleepy. I don't think he signs his name very well.'

'He doesn't have to have beautiful writing. He just has to sign,' said the agent.

'Can I hold his hand, to help him?'

'Yes, hold his hand, girl - that'll be all right.'

'Netty went into the house, and the agent went on smoking his cigar outside the window. He saw Netty put the pen and the papers in front of her uncle,

and touch his arm, and speak to him. She showed him where to write his name on the papers, and put the pen in his hand. Then she stood behind him, and held his hand. But the agent could still see a bit of his head, and he saw the old man's hand write his name on the papers.

Then Netty came out and gave the papers to the agent, and the agent signed his name as witness. He gave her the paper signed by the squire, and left.

And the next morning Netty told the neighbours that her uncle was dead in his bed.

So that's how Netty Sargent lost her house and field, and got them back again - with a husband. But Jasper was a mistake as a husband. After a few years he started hitting Netty - not very hard, but it made her angry. Then she told a neighbour about the leasehold business, and the story got around. By then the old squire was dead, and the squire's son got to hear the story. But Netty was a pretty young woman, and the squire's son never did anything about it.

Soon the carrier's wagon came down the hill into Longpuddle, and everybody got out and went home. John Lackland's son went to find a room at the Dog and Fox. He stayed in Longpuddle for a few days, walking around, looking at things, and talking to people. Then he left, and no one saw him again.

'Where did he go?' the schoolteacher asked Mrs Weedle in the post office one day.

'I don't know,' said Mrs Weedle. 'He didn't tell anyone. He just went.'

'Why did he come back to Longpuddle, do you think?'

'He said he just wanted to see the place where he was a child. But perhaps he came back to get a wife, and couldn't find one. Who knows?'

- THE END -