



The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By
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HEZEKIAH

CHAPTER V.

The Strange Behavior of a Chimney.

THERE was no reason in the world why Hartley Wiggins should not call upon two ladies living in Westchester county, and I must say that he appeared to advantage in Miss Hollister's library.

He had got into his evening clothes somewhere, perhaps at a neighboring inn or maybe at the house of a friend, for he could not possibly have motored into town and back since his interview with Cecilia in the highway. He had impressed the clerk at the Hare and Tortoise with the idea that he had left New York for a long absence, and he had apparently camped at the gates of Hopefield to be near Cecilia.

When he had paid his compliments to the ladies he turned to me with an almost imperceptible lifting of the brows, but he was cordial enough. If he was surprised or disappointed at seeing me his manner did not betray the feeling.

"Glad to see you, Ames. Rather nice weather this."
"Even Dakota couldn't do better," I affirmed with a grin, but he ignored the fling.

Cecilia stirred restlessly, and I felt decidedly ill at ease. Miss Hollister crossed to the fireplace and poked the logs.
Just what part Hezekiah Hollister played in the situation was beyond me. If I had not witnessed Wiggins' clandestine meeting with Cecilia matters would have been clearer to my comprehension, but his appearance at the house after the colloquy I had overheard from the brier patch was in itself inexplicable. Miss Hollister's singular references to Hezekiah—a person about whom my curiosity was now a good deal aroused—added to the mystery that infolded the library.

Responsive to Miss Hollister's energetic prodding, the flames in the fireplace leaped into the great throat of the chimney with a roar. She turned, her back to the blaze, and looked upon her guests benignantly.

"If all your fuses draw like that one they are not seriously in need of doctoring," I remarked.

"Flues are nothing if not erratic," replied Miss Hollister. The subject did not appear to interest her, nor had she, by the remotest suggestion, referred to the object of my coming. I had sniffed vainly in the halls above and below for any trace of the stale smoke which usually greeted me at once on my arrival at the house of a client. "The house was built, you may not know, for a manufacturer of umbrellas, who died before he had occupied it, in circumstances I may later disclose to you, which accounts, Mr. Ames, for that figure of Cupid under a plink parasol on the drawing room ceiling. At the first opportunity I shall remove it, as baby Cupids are irreconcilable with the militant love-making I admire. I consider umbrellas detestable and never carry one when I can command a mackintosh."

"When I'm on the ranch I wear a slicker," said Wiggins. "It's bullet proof, and that I have found at times a decided advantage."
We discussed mackintoshes for at least ten minutes with far more sprightliness than I had imagined the subject could evoke. Then Miss Hollister, after a turn up and down the room, paused beside me.

"Mr. Ames," she said, "would you care to join me in a game of billiards? I'm not in my best form, but I think we might profitably knock the balls for half an hour."
I acquiesced with alacrity. I assumed it to be Miss Hollister's purpose to leave Cecilia and Wiggins alone. I should be rendering Wiggins and Cecilia a service by withdrawing, and I was glad of a chance to escape.

To my infinite surprise they both protested, not in mere polite murmurs, but with considerable vehemence.
"It's quite cool tonight, and I don't believe you ought to use the billiard room until the plumber has fixed the radiator," said Cecilia.

"And if you knew Mr. Ames' game I'm sure you wouldn't care to waste time on him," piped Wiggins, whom I had frequently vanquished in billiard bouts at the Hare and Tortoise, where, I may say modestly, I had long been considered one of the most formidable of the club's players.

Both he and Cecilia had risen, and we stood, I remember, just before the hearth during this exchange. At this moment a singular thing happened. The fire that had been sweeping in a broad wavelike curve into the chimney was checked suddenly. I had repeatedly remarked the admirable draft, the facile grace of the flame as it rose and vanished. The cessation of the draft was unmarked by any of those premonitory symptoms by which a fire usually gives warning of evil intentions. The upward current of air had



I Seized the Tongs and Poker and Began Adjusting the Logs.

ceased utterly and without apparent cause. We were all aware of a choking, a gasping in the deep flue, which could not be accounted for by any natural stoppage incident to chimneys—the dislodging of masonry or a packing of soot. The former was hardly possible and the house was not old enough to make the latter theory plausible. From my survey of the flue on my arrival in the afternoon I judged that this particular chimney had been little used.

The smoke now rolled out in billows and drove us back from the hearth. I seized the tongs and poker and began readjusting the logs, without, however, any hope of correcting a difficulty that lay patiently in the upper regions of the flue itself. The smoke, after a courageous effort to rise, encountered an obstruction of some sort and ebbed back upon the hearth and out into the room. My efforts to stop the trouble by shifting the logs were futile, as I expected them to be, and I retreated quickly, making, I fear, no very gallant appearance as I mopped my face and eyes.

"Well," exclaimed Miss Hollister, who had rung for a servant to open the doors and windows, "this is certainly most extraordinary. What solution do you offer, Mr. Ames?"

"The matter requires investigation. I can't venture an opinion until I have made a thorough investigation. The night is perfectly quiet, and the wind is hardly responsible. I think we had better abandon the room until I can solve this riddle in the morning."

The prompt opening of the windows and doors caused the slow dispersion of the smoke, but the lights in the room still shone dimly as through a fog.

"It's beastly!" ejaculated Wiggins, coughing. "I didn't suppose Pepperton would put a flue like that into a house. He ought to be shot!"

"It is fortunate," said Miss Hollister, "that Mr. Ames is on the ground. He now has a case that will test his most acute powers of diagnosis."

The logs that had burned so brightly before the chimney choked still held their flames stubbornly, and I had advised against pouring water upon them, fearing to crack the brick and stone work. We were about to adjourn to the drawing room. Miss Hollister and the others had in fact reached the door, leaving me alone before the hearth. Then, as I stood half blinded watching the smoke pour out into the room and more puzzled than I had over been before in any of my employments, the chimney, with a deep intake of breath, began drawing the smoke upward again. The flames caught and spread with renewed ardor, and when the trio still loitering in the hall returned in answer to my exclamation of surprise, the flue had recovered its composure and was behaving in a sane and normal manner.

"A swallow undoubtedly fell into the chimney and then got itself out again," suggested Cecilia.

"The logs must have been wet. The sap hadn't dried out yet," proposed Wiggins.

"The wood was as dry as tinder," averred Miss Hollister, not without irritation. "And one swallow does not make a summer or a chimney smoke. It must have been a changing current of air. I was reading a book on ballooning the other day, and it is remarkable how the air currents change." "That is quite possible, as the air cools rapidly after sunset at this season, and that is bound to have an effect on the quality and resistance of the atmosphere," I replied sagely.

"Perhaps," suggested Miss Hollister, with one of those flashes of animation that were so delightful in her, "it was a ghost. The presence of a ghost in this house would give me the greatest pleasure. I should look upon a ghost's appearance at Hopefield Manor as a great compliment. If any reputable, decent ghost should by any chance take up his residence in this house I should give him every encouragement."

Miss Hollister seemed to have forgotten the proposed game of billiards. The chimney's lawless demonstration had, in fact, given a new turn to the evening. We discussed ghosts for half an hour, and then, without having enjoyed any opportunity for a single private word with Cecilia, Wiggins rose to leave. He shook hands all around and bowed from the door. It was in my mind to follow, making a pretext of walking with him to the station or of helping him find his car, but nothing in his good night to me encouraged such attentions, and as I pondered the outer door closed upon my irresolution.

At the stroke of 10 Miss Hollister rose and excused herself. "We breakfast at 8, Mr. Ames. I trust the hour does not conflict with your habits."

I assured her that the hour was wholly agreeable, and she gave me her hand with great dignity.

When I turned toward Cecilia she had moved to a seat close by the hearth and was gazing dreamily into the fire, now a bed of glowing coals.

"It was odd," I remarked.

"You mean the chimney?"

"Yes. It was quite unaccountable. I confess that I never knew a chimney's mood to change so abruptly."

She sat silent for several minutes and then she lifted her head and her eyes met mine.

"Pardon me, Mr. Ames, but did my aunt ask you here to examine the chimneys? I didn't quite understand. We have been here only a week; the weather has been warm, and I believe this fire had not been lighted before today. You will pardon my frankness, but I can't quite understand why my aunt invited you here if you came professionally. I thought when you appeared this afternoon that you were a guest—nothing more—or less."

"You had heard nothing of any trouble with the fireplaces? Then I am in the dark as much as you. As I understood it, I was called here to examine the flues; but, now that I think of it, she did not say explicitly that her chimneys were behaving badly, though that was, of course, implied. I naturally assumed that she summoned me here in my professional capacity. I was a stranger to your aunt; she would hardly have invited me otherwise. I imagine, however, that your aunt acts a good deal on impulse. Her asking me here may have been only a whim."

"Please don't imagine that your coming has not been agreeable to me," Cecilia protested. "My aunt is quite capable of inviting a stranger to the house. She met you, I believe, at the Asolando. I hope you understand that it is only because I am in deep trouble, Mr. Ames, trouble of the gravest nature, that I have ventured to speak to you in this way of my aunt, for whom I have all respect and affection."

She had never, I was sure, been lovelier than at this moment. Her eyes filled, but she lifted her head proudly. Whatever the trouble might be I was sorry for it on her own account, and if it involved Hartley Wiggins my sympathy went out to him also. On an impulse I spoke of him.

"I was surprised to meet Hartley Wiggins here. He's a dear friend of mine, you know. I thought he had gone to his ranch. He left the Hare and Tortoise very abruptly a few nights ago just after we had dined together. He must be stopping somewhere in the neighborhood."

"It's quite possible. And there's an inn, you know. I fancy he drove over from there."

"I hadn't thought of that—the Prescott Arms I suppose you mean."
She nodded, but she was clearly not interested in me, and when I found myself falling dismally to divert her thoughts to cheerfurther channels I rose and bade her good night.

The servant who had previously attended me appeared promptly when I reached my room, bearing a tray, with biscuits and a bottle of ale. He gave me an envelope addressed in a hand I already knew as Miss Octavia's, and I opened and read:

The following I either forget or distrust, so kindly refrain from mentioning them while you are a guest of Hopefield Manor:

Automobiles.
Mashed potatoes.
Waltzes.
Chopin's Concerto in E minor (op. 11).
Bishop's Coadjutor.
Limericks.
Cats.

OCTAVIA HOLLISTER.
Before I slept I threw up my window and stepped out upon a narrow balcony that afforded a capital view of the fields and woods to the east. The night was fine, with the sky bright with stars and moon. As my eyes dropped from the horizon to the near landscape I saw a man perched on a knoll in the

midst of a cornfield. He stood as rigid as a sentry on duty, or like a forlorn commander counting the spears of his tattered battalions. I was not sure that he saw me, for the balcony was slightly shadowed, but, at any rate, he was sharply outlined to my vision. His derby hat and overcoat gave him an odd appearance as he stood brooding above the corn. Then he vanished suddenly, though as he retired toward the highway I followed him for some time by the shaking and jerking of the corn stalks. I determined to make every effort to see Wiggins the next day and learn the exact status of his affair with Cecilia Hollister.

(To Be Continued.)

Local News

From Monday's Daily.

E. J. Hennings and wife of near Cedar Creek were in the city today attending to some trading.

W. D. Wheeler and son, Albert, were in town Saturday attending to some trading with the merchants.

James W. Holmes of Murray came up Saturday and attended to some business matters in this city for a short time.

Louie Thomas came in this afternoon from Missouri Valley, Iowa, where he had been attending to business matters.

P. A. Horn was in Saturday from the vicinity of Cedar Creek doing the week-end shopping and visiting with friends.

C. E. Metzger drove up Saturday from his home, near Mynard, and spent several hours in this city with his many friends.

Mrs. A. F. Seybert, of Cullom was in the city today for a few hours visiting relatives and attending to some trading.

Ether Hunter of Fremont was a visitor here at the W. A. Robertson home, returning to her home yesterday afternoon.

John Kaffenberger was in town Saturday for a few hours visiting his friends and attending to some trading with the merchants.

A. M. Holmes of Murray was a visitor here yesterday with relatives, returning to his home this morning on the 8:45 train.

Ed Becker drove in Saturday from his home, west of this city, and attended to some business matters here for a short time.

Ed Thrall, wife and niece, Miss Grace Thomas, were passengers this morning for Omaha, where they spent the day taking in the sights.

James Robertson and wife drove out to Louisville this morning to visit with friends there and to look after some property interests.

George P. Meisinger, jr., drove in Saturday from his farm, near this city, and visited with relatives, as well as attending to some trading.

John Hellflicker and daughter, of near Cedar Creek, were in the city Saturday for a few hours attending to some trading with the merchants.

Charles Matous and wife of Bavelock came down Saturday evening on No. 2 from their home and visited over Sunday here with relatives.

Frank Steppat and wife came in Saturday afternoon from their home, near this city, and spent several hours looking after some week-end shopping.

Joe Peters, accompanied by Roy Rinker, Anton Humla and Ezra Crabill and family, were passengers this morning for Glenwood, where the gentlemen will go to work on the contract of Mr. Peters' in that city.

Captain Isaac Wiles and wife and Luke Wiles and family were visitors yesterday in Glenwood, where they were guests at the Dean home. The members of this family suffered severely in the tornado last Sunday.

Attention!
We can write you a Tornado Policy for Five Hundred Dollars for five years for 75 cents a year; larger ones at the same ratio. At this low rate you cannot afford to be without insurance. Windham Investment & Loan Co. 3-24-17

The Journal Want Ads for results.

You Can Prevent Hog Cholera— Kill Hog Worms and Have Fat Hogs.



Don't let Hog Cholera and Worms scare you—it's an easy matter to prevent them. This positive fact is vouched for by thousands of Farmers and Hog Raisers in nearly every state in the Union. Just feed with the daily hog ration a small quantity of

MERRY WAR POWDERED LYE

It renders hogs immune to Cholera; tones them up; keeps them on their feet; makes them fat and sleek; destroys Worms; increases your pork profits.

MERRY WAR POWDERED LYE has proved itself to be the surest preventive of Hog Cholera, exterminator of Worms and the best hog conditioner and fattener in the world. Here is evidence that will convince you. Mr. H. H. Unterkircher of Wever, Iowa, writes: "I am recommending MERRY WAR POWDERED LYE to everyone I see, as it is a great hog conditioner and worm destroyer."



Ask us about MERRY WAR POWDERED LYE.

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Local News

From Tuesday's Daily.

E. T. Younker of Glenwood was in the city yesterday for a few hours attending to some matters of business.

County Commissioner C. R. Jordan of Alvo came in last evening to attend the meeting of the commissioners today.

George A. Kaffenberger and wife were passengers this morning for Omaha, where they visited for the day with friends.

Winfield Swan and Fred Clark of Union came up this morning to attend to some business matters at the court house.

George J. Meisinger of Mynard was in the city yesterday for a few hours attending to some trading with the merchants.

Mark White and wife drove up yesterday from their home near Rock Bluffs and attended to some trading with the merchants.

Ben Beckman, accompanied by his son-in-law, Louie Rheinacke, and his grandson, were in the city today looking after some business matters.

Henry Snoke and wife of Eagle came in this morning on the M. P. for a few hours' business trip, and departed on No. 15 for Omaha.

L. D. Hiatt, the Murray merchant, came up this morning and was a passenger on No. 15 for Omaha, where he was called on business matters.

Editor C. L. Graves of the Union Ledger came up this morning on the early Missouri Pacific train to attend to some business matters at the court house.

Henry Barnum Miller and Anton Nitka were passengers on the early Burlington train for Omaha to attend to some business matters and take in the sights in the big city.

Raymond Cotton of Scotland, S. D., who has been a guest here at the Chris Wohlfarth home for a few days, departed on the early Burlington train today for his home.

The Boys' club of St. Luke's parish met at the rectory last night and were entertained by Mr. William R. Egenberger. Dr. Stewart Livingston was present and gave a very interesting talk to the boys. Mrs. Wilson and Miss Violet Dodge served some delicious refreshments which were much appreciated by the boys, and they feel deeply grateful to Mr. Egenberger and Father and Mrs. Wilson for the fine time enjoyed last evening.

Illustration of a barn and a landscape. Text: Increase the value and improve the appearance of your Barns, Roofs, Fences and Outbuildings with SHERWIN-WILLIAMS COMMONWEALTH BARN RED. An easy working, hard drying paint of clean, bright color and handsome gloss. It covers well, moderate in price, and exceedingly economical. Will far more than return every dollar paid in increased selling or renting value of your property. In gallons, five gallon packages, and barrels. Always Full Measure.

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