



The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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HEZEKIAH

CHAPTER XI.

My Befuddlement Increases.

YOU must understand, Mr. Ames, that my daughters, both of them, are very dear to me," said Bassford Hollister. "It is the great grief of my life that, owing to matters beyond my control, I have been unable to care for them as I should like to do. This being the case, I have been obliged to allow them to accept many favors from my only sister Octavia. This, in ordinary circumstances, would not be repugnant to my pride, but my sister is a very unusual person. She must do for my children in her own way, and while I was prepared, in agreeing that they should accept her bounty, for some whimsical manifestation of her eccentric character, I did not imagine that she would go so far as to shut me out from all knowledge of her plans for them. That, Mr. Ames, is what has happened."

His voice rose and fell mournfully. He puffed his pipe for a moment and continued:

"There is now something forward here which I do not understand. I have an idea that Octavia has contrived some preposterous scheme for choosing a husband for Cecilia that is in keeping with her odd fashion of transacting all her business. I do not know its nature, and by the terms of her agreement Cecilia is not to disclose the method to be employed to me—not even to me, her own father. You must agree, Ames, that that is rather rubbing it in."

"But you don't assume that your daughter is not to be a free agent in the matter? You don't believe that some unworthy and improper man is to be forced upon her?"

"That, sir, is exactly what I fear."

"You will pardon me, but I cannot for a moment believe that Miss Hollister would risk her niece's happiness even to satisfy her own peculiar humor. Your sister is a shrewd woman, and her heart, I am convinced, is the kindest. Among the suitors now camped at the Prescott Arms there must be some one whom your daughter approves, and I see no reason why he should not ultimately be her choice. Now that you have broached the matter, I make free to say that one of these suitors is an old friend of mine, Hartley Wiggins by name, and that he is a man of the highest character and a gentleman in the strictest sense."

He had been listening to me with the greatest composure, but at the mention of Wiggins' name he started and nervously clutched my arm.

"That man may be all that you say," he cried chokingly, "but he has acted infamously toward both my daughters. He is a rogue and a most despicable fellow. He has flirted outrageously with Hezekiah while at the same time pretending to be deeply interested in Cecilia."

"But, my dear sir, is it not possible that you do him a great wrong? May it not be the other way round that Hezekiah is trifling with Wiggins' affections? He's a splendid fellow, Hartley Wiggins, but he's a little slow that's all. And between two superb young women like your daughters a man may be pardoned for doubts and hesitation. The thing is bound to straighten itself out."

He tossed his head impatiently.

"Has it occurred to you that Octavia's interest in this Hartley Wiggins may be due to a trifling and immaterial fact?"

"Nothing beyond his indubitable eligibility."

"Then let me tell you what I suspect. Both his names contain seven letters. My sister is slightly cracked as to the number seven. I swear to you my belief that the fact that his names contain seven letters each is at the bottom of all this. Incredible, my dear sir, but wholly possible!"

"Then, such being the case, why doesn't she show her hand openly? You send conjecture far when once you entertain so absurd an idea."

"You think my assumption unlikely?" he asked eagerly.

"I certainly do, Mr. Hollister. You may as well assume that, as Wiggins is specially favored in the number of letters in his singularly prosaic and unromantic name, it is Miss Hollister's plan to keep him dallying seven years."

stood off and eyed me fiercely. "You speak of serving and of service! Will you tell me just why you are here and what brings you into this affair? What are you doing in my sister's house, where I have to come like a thief in the night to see one of my own children?"

I hastened to declare my profession and that I had been summoned by Miss Hollister to examine her chimneys. I could not, however, tell him that until my arrival the chimneys had behaved themselves admirably.

"You've admitted your friendship for this Wiggins person—that's enough," he said when I had concluded. "I advise you to leave the house at once. I tell you he's got to be eliminated from the situation. Understand that I do not threaten you with violence, but I will not promise to abstain from visiting heavy punishment upon that fellow. And you? A chimney doctor? I am a man of considerable knowledge of the world, and I say to you very candidly that I don't believe there is any such profession."

"Then let me tell you," I replied, not without heat, "that I am a graduate in architecture. I am your sister's guest, and as she is perfectly competent to manage her own affairs I shall stay here as long as it pleases her to ask me to remain. And now, one other matter. How did you gain this roof tonight, when by your own admission you are not on such terms with your sister as would justify you in entering it openly?"

The moonlight did not fail to convey the contempt in his face, but I thought he grinned as he answered quietly:

"You don't seem to understand, young man, that you are entitled to no explanations from me. You strike me as a singularly fresh young person. It would be a positive grief to me to feel that my conduct had displeased you. And now, as the night grows chill, I shall beg you to precede me into the house by the way you came."

"But first," I persisted, "let me ask a question. It is possible that you yourself have some preference among your daughter's several suitors, Mr. Hollister. Would you object to telling me which one you would choose for Miss Cecilia?"

"Beyond question the man for Cecilia, if I have any voice in the matter, is Lord Arrowood."

"Arrowood?" I exclaimed. "You surprise me greatly. I saw him at the Inn, and he seemed to me the most insignificant and uninteresting one of the lot."

"That proves you a person of poor gifts of discernment, Mr. Ames." And his tone and manner were quite reminiscent of his sister's ways, and his further explanation proved him even more worthily the brother of his sister.

"As I was obliged," he began, "owing to an unfortunate physical handicap, to abandon my art, that of a marine painter, I have given my attention for a number of years to the study of the Irish situation. I met Arrowood by chance in the highway yesterday, and I found that he holds exactly my ideas, which favor Irish independence."

"This certainly had the true Hollister touch."

"And so," Bassford Hollister concluded, "I naturally incline toward Arrowood, though he is so poor that he was obliged to come over in the steerage to continue his wooing of my daughter."

He let himself down into the dark trunk room, waited for me courteously and walked by my side to the stairway, both of us maintaining silence. I was deeply curious to know how he had entered and whether he expected to go down the front way and out the main door. We kept together to the third floor hall. I could have sworn to that. Then suddenly, just as we reached the stairway, out went the lights, and we were in utter darkness. I smothered an exclamation, clutched my matches and struck a light, and as the stick flamed slowly I looked about for Bassford Hollister. But he had vanished as suddenly and completely as though a trap had yawned beneath us and swallowed him. I found the third floor switch, and it responded immediately, flooding the stair well to the lower hall, but I neither saw nor heard anything more of Hollister.

Astounded by this performance, I continued on to the lower floor to have a look around, and there, calmly reading by the library table, sat Miss Octavia!

"Late hours, Mr. Ames!" she cried. "I supposed you had retired long ago."

"Pardon my troubling you, but may I inquire, Miss Hollister, how long you have been sitting here?"

The clock on the stair began to strike 12, and she listened composedly to a few of the deep toned strokes before

replying. "Just half an hour. I thought some one knocked at my door about an hour ago. The lights were on and I came down, saw a magazine that had escaped my eye before and here you find me."

"Some one knocked at your door?" "I thought so. You know, the servants have an idea that the place is haunted, and I thought that if I sat here the ghost might take it upon himself to walk. I confess to a slight disappointment that it is only you who have appeared. I suppose it wasn't you who knocked at my door?"

"No," I replied, laughing a little at her manner, "not unless it was you who switched off the lights as I was coming down from the fourth floor. I have been studying this chimney from the roof. I know something of the ways of electric switches, and they don't usually move of their own accord."

"Your coming to this house has been the greatest joy to me, Mr. Ames. I should not have imagined in a chance look at you that you were psychical, and yet such is clearly the fact. I assure you that I have not touched any switch since I left my room. It was unnecessary, as I found the lights on. And I acquit you of rapping, rapping at my chamber door. It gives me the greatest satisfaction to assume that the house is haunted, and at any time you find the ghost I beg that you will lose no time in presenting me."

She wore a remarkable lavender dressing gown and a nightcap such as I had never seen outside a museum. As she concluded her speech, spoken in that curious lilting tone which from the beginning had left me in doubt as to the seriousness of all her statements, she rose and, still clasping her magazine, made me a courtesy and was soon mounting the stair.

I heard her door close a minute later, and then, feeling that I had earned the right to repose, I went to my room and to bed.

I slept late and on going down found the table set in the breakfast room. Miss Octavia entered briskly, her slight figure concealed by a prodigious gingham apron.

"Good morning, merry gentleman," she began blithely. "The most delightful thing has happened. Without the slightest warning, without the faintest intimation of their dissatisfaction, the house servants have departed, with the single exception of my personal maid, who, being a Swede and therefore singularly devoid of emotion, was unshaken by the ghost rumors that have sent the rest of my staff scampering over the hills."

She lighted the coffee machine lamp in her most tranquil fashion and begged me to be seated.

"I have already breakfasted," she continued, "and Cecilia is even now preparing you an omelet with her own hand. I beg to reassure you as my guest that the departure of the servants causes me not the slightest annoyance. Cecilia is an excellent cook, and I myself shall not starve so long as I have strength to crack an egg or lift a stove lid. And besides, I still retain my early trust in Providence. I do not doubt that before nightfall a corps of excellent servants will again be on duty here. Very likely they are even now bound for this place, coming from the wet coasts of Ireland, from Liverpool and from lonely villages in Scandinavia. I hope you will testify to the fact that I faced this day in the cheeriest and most hopeful spirit."

"Not only shall I do so, Miss Hollister," I replied, trying to catch her own note, "but it will throughout my life give me the greatest satisfaction to set your cause right. To that extent let me be Horatio to your Hamlet."

"Thank you, mildred," she returned, with the utmost gravity. "And may I say further that the incident gives the stamp of authenticity to my ghost? I was obliged to pay those people double wages to lure them from the felicities of the city, and they must have been a good deal alarmed to have left so precipitately. You must excuse me now, as it is necessary for me to do the pastry cook's work this morning, that individual having fled with the rest, and it being incumbent on me to maintain whether—I can't express the dislike I feel in doing this—but can you tell me whether you have seen in the hands of my niece Cecilia a small, very small, silver backed notebook?"

"Yes; I have," I answered, greatly surprised.

"And may I ask whether—and again I must plead deep concern—as an excuse for making such an inquiry—whether you by any chance saw her making any notation in that book?"

"My fee simple in this property, to make a dozen pies before high noon. But first I must visit the stables, where I believe the coachman still lingers, having been prevented from joining the stampede of the house servants by the painful twinges of gout."

With this she left me, and I began pecking at a grapefruit. It had been in my mind as I dressed that morning to play truant and visit the city. It was almost imperative that I take a look at my office, and I had resolved upon a plan which would, I believed, give me the key to the ghost mystery. If Pepperton had built that house he must know whether he had contrived any secret passages that would afford exits and entrances not apparent to the eye. It would be an easy matter to run into the city, explain myself to my assistant and get hold of Pepperton. My mind was made up, and I had even consulted a time table and chosen one of the express trains.

(To Be Continued.)

If you have a house for rent try a Journal Want Ad.

INTERESTING CASE IN THE COUNTY COURT

From Wednesday's Daily. The attention of the county court was taken up this morning over the contest of the estate of David Christian Kunz, deceased, of Elmwood. The contestant is John William Kunz of Berlin, a son of the deceased by his first marriage, who left home when quite young and has not received his share of the estate sufficient to satisfy him. The heirs, Henry L. Kunz, Rose Helen Panska, Martha Rumelin, Mary Louisa Kunz, Emma Elizabeth Kunz and A. I. Bast, were all here today to attend the hearing of the case. The estate is quite large, as Mr. Kunz was one of the wealthiest men in the western part of the county and owned considerable farm land, as well as much personal property.

SUIT FOR POSSESSION OF HOUSE OCCUPIED BY JOHN A. LONG

In the court of Justice M. Archer yesterday afternoon the case of C. A. Peterson vs. John A. Long, a suit for forcible detainer, was given a hearing before a jury composed of J. H. Thrasher, John Hatt, William Weber and William Hassler. The suit is for possession of a house belonging to Peterson, which is occupied by Long, who claims his lease has not expired on the place. Owing to the absence of several essential witnesses the case was continued until Thursday morning. The plaintiff was represented by W. A. Robertson, while Charles Martin appeared for the defendant. The case attracted quite a large crowd of spectators from the locality where the parties reside, in the south part of the city.

CHASE THE TYPHOID FLY BY CLEANING UP AT ONCE

"Everybody clean up, don't let the rubbish lie. Everybody clean up, and chase the typhoid fly. Clean your yard with all your might. Everybody clean up, and chase the right."

Bang! Slam! Bing!

"If you want to clean up, leave no rubbish there; Everybody does it, and every one should care. Everybody stir about and clean up, anyhow. Everybody clean up now!"

THE JOURNAL'S PUBLISHED LIFE OF GENERAL LEWIS CASS

After publication in the Journal of the life sketch of General Lewis Cass, Judge B. S. Ramsey sent a copy of the Journal containing same to Hon. Clarence S. Paine, secretary of the Nebraska State Historical society, and today received the following from Mr. Paine:

"Dear Mr. Ramsey: Many thanks for your thoughtfulness in sending us copy of the Plattsmouth Journal of March 6. This will be filed in our library for permanent reference. Very cordially yours, C. S. Paine."

Dance Is Postponed.

The dance which was to have been given by the St. Agnes Sodality at the K. S. hall on Saturday evening, May 3, has been postponed until Saturday evening, May 10. The best of music will be on hand and a general good time is in store for all who attend. Remember the date—Saturday, May 10.

New Agricultural Exhibit.

The Burlington has established on the first floor of its new general office building at Chicago, a permanent agricultural exhibit, consisting chiefly of samples of products of Nebraska, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. Lectures on farming in these four states will be given from time to time by prominent agricultural experts. James J. Hill attended the opening of the exhibit on April 10.

FOREST ROSE—The best flour on the market. Give it a trial.

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

"I am a Merry War Lye Hog" 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 dolly 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. A. W. White, Dry Goods & Groceries PLATTSMOUTH. Phones: Ind. 206, Bell 71 NEBR.

Local News

From Wednesday's Daily. Miss Emma Kunz of Elmwood is in the city making a visit with Misses Dora and Ola Kaffenberger.

Fred Hawthorn came in last evening from Lincoln to visit relatives and look after matters of business.

Attorney C. E. Tefft of Weeping Water came in this morning to look after business at the county court house.

Mrs. R. E. Andrews departed this afternoon for Omaha, after a short visit here with her mother, Mrs. Sarah Kerr.

Attorney C. S. Aldrich of Elmwood, was in the city today for a few hours attending to business matters at the court house.

E. A. Kirkpatrick of Nehawka was in the city last evening for a short time attending to some trading with the merchants.

G. W. Skiles of Elmwood precinct came in this morning and spent several hours looking after business at the court house.

L. W. Roetger of Elmwood was here today in attendance at the hearing on the David Christian Kunz estate in county court.

Henry Born drove in this morning from his farm, southwest of this city, and attended to some trading with the merchants.

P. A. Hild of Mt. Pleasant precinct came in last evening from Omaha, where he had been for the day attending to business affairs.

Attorney William DelesDernier of Elmwood was in the city today, being called here to look after business matters in the county court.

Mrs. Joseph J. Johnson and little son arrived this morning on No. 6 from Denver, Colorado, having been called here by the serious illness of Mrs. Johnson's mother, Mrs. Henry Eikenbary.

Mrs. William Wetenkamp and Mrs. W. T. Richardson came up this morning from their homes at Mynard and were passengers on the early Burlington train for Omaha.

The Celebrated Percheron Stallion **Jaloux** Jaloux is a beautiful black Percheron, weighing 1950 pounds, foaled March 5, 1909 bred by M. Durand, Department of Orne, and imported by E. J. Heisel, Fremont, Iowa, in October, 1911, and is recorded in the Percheron Society of America, No. 81876. Jaloux has a splendid record, a strong pedigree, and is an excellent log getter. Jaloux will make the season of 1913 as follows: Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of each week at the barn of Henry Ragosa, five miles southeast of Louisville; Thursday Friday and Saturday at Wm. Wetenkams, two miles west of Mynard. TERMS—\$15.00 to insure colt to stand and suck. Care will be taken to prevent accidents, but will not be held responsible should any occur. **August Klemm**

Remember the Regalia Habana Cigar. Always the best. Robert Richter, manufacturer.

Have you tried the Forest Rose flour? If not, why not? It is the best flour on the market and is sold by all dealers.

W. S. Smith came up this morning from his home at Murray and was a passenger on the early Burlington train for Omaha, where he visited for several hours.

R. A. Blair, superintendent of construction, who has charge of the work for the government at the rifle range, was a passenger this afternoon for Omaha.

P. E. Ruffner and his brother-in-law, E. A. Kirkpatrick, of Nehawka, were passengers this afternoon for Omaha, where they looked after some business matters.

The Holly orchestra will furnish the music next Saturday evening for the M. W. A. dance at the new Woodman hall, and it will be strictly up-to-date. Admission: Gents, 50c; ladies, free.

Mrs. G. H. Hennings and Miss Mildred Hanson of Omaha were in the city over night attending the Woodman Circle, and while here were guests of Mrs. M. E. Manspeaker. They returned home this morning.

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