



The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

Copyright, 1910, by Meredith Nicholson

HEZEKIAH

CHAPTER II.

The Beginning of My Adventure.

WIGGINS' strange conduct and Jewett's dark hints so disturbed me that the very next afternoon I again sought the Asolando tea room, feeling that in its atmosphere I might best weigh the few facts I possessed touching my friend's love affairs.

Those who care for details in these matters may be interested to know that the Asolando is tucked away among print shops and exclusive haberdashers, a stone's throw from Fifth avenue. The Asolando tea room is sacred to wooers of the flute of Pan, secession photographers and confident believers in an early revival of the poetic drama. There is about the little room a suggestion of tranquillity, of charming cloisteral peace, with its racks of books, its portraits of Browning, Rossetti, Burne-Jones and kindred spirits.

I chose a table, sat down and suggested (one does not order at the Asolando) a few articles from the card an attendant handed me.

"We're out of the Paracelsus ginger cookies," she replied, "but I recommend a Ruskin sandwich with our own special chocolate. The whipped cream is unusually fine today."

She eyed me with a severity to which I was not accustomed, and I acquiesced without parley in her suggestion. Before leaving she placed on my table the latest minor poet in green and gold.

It was nearly 3 o'clock, and I was alone in the Asolando. The attending waitresses in their snowy gowns had vanished behind the screen at the rear of the room. The food and drink with which I had been promptly served proved excellent. Even the minor poet in green and gold had held my attention, though imitations of Coventry Patmore's odes bore me as a rule. Near the street, half concealed behind a mosquito grill, sat the cashier, reading. A bundle of joss sticks in a green jar beside this young woman sent a thin smoke into the air. Her head was bent above her book in quiet attention. The light from an electric lamp made a glow of her golden hair. She was an incident of the general picture, a part of a scene that contained no jarring note. A man who could devise, in the heart of the great city, a place so instinct with repose so lulling to all the senses was not less than a public benefactor.

It was at this moment that the adventure—for it shall have no meaner name—actually began. My eyes were



"I beg your pardon, but this seems to be the seventh table."

still enjoying the Rossetti-like vision in the cashier's tiny booth when a figure suddenly darkened the street door just beyond her. The girl lifted her head. On the instant the lamp key clicked as she extinguished her light, and the aureoled head ceased to be. And coming toward me down the shop I beheld a lady, a lady of years, who passed the cashier's desk with her eyes in-

tent upon the room's inner recesses. Her gown, of a new fashionable gray, was of the severest tailor cut. Her hat was a modified fedora, gray like the gown, and adorned with a single gray feather. She was short, slight, erect, and moved with a quick bird-like motion, pausing and glancing at the vacant tables that lay between me and the door. She appeared to be engaged in a calculation of some sort, and she raised a lorgnette to assist her in counting the tables. The cashier passed behind her unseen and vanished. I heard the newcomer reciting: "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven." And at seven her eyes rested upon me with a look that mingled surprise and annoyance. She took a step toward me, and I started to rise, but she said quickly:

"I beg your pardon, but this seems to be the seventh table."

"Now that you call my attention to it," I remarked, gaining my feet, "I am bound to concede the point. If by any chance I am intruding—"

"Not in the least. On the other hand, I beg that you remain where you are." And without further ado she sank into a chair opposite my own.

I tinkled a tiny crystal bell that was among the table furnishings, and a waitress appeared and handed the lady, who had thus introduced herself to my acquaintance, a copy of the tiny card on which the articles of refreshment offered by the Asolando were indicated within a border of hand painted field daisies.

"Never mind that," said the lady in gray, ignoring the card. "You may bring me a caviar sandwich and a cocktail, a pink one, provided—provided"—and she held the waitress with her eye—"you have the imported caviar and your barkeeper knows the proper frappe of the spirit lifter I have named."

"Pardon me, madam," replied the waitress lily, "but you have mistaken the place. The Asolando serves nothing stronger than the pure water of its own fount of Castalia. Intoxicants are not permitted here."

"Intoxicants?" repeated the old lady with asperity. "Do I look like a person given to intoxication? I dare say your Castalia water is nothing but Croton whose flavor has been destroyed by distillation. You may bring me the sandwich I have mentioned and with it a pot of tea. Yes, thank you, lemon with the tea."

As the girl vanished with the light tray that marked the service of the place I again made as to rise, but the old lady lifted her hand with a delaying posture.

"Pray remain. It is not unlikely that we have friends and ideas in common, and as you were seated at the seventh table it is possible that some ordering of fate has brought us together."

She took from me in the hand which she had now ungloved the copy of my minor poet, glanced at it scornfully and tossed it upon the floor with every mark of disdain.

"What species of mental disorder does this place represent?" she demanded.

"It is sacred to the fine arts apparently; an endowed tea room where persons of artistic ideals may come to refresh body and soul. Such at least seems to be the program. This is only my second visit, but I have long heard it spoken of by artists, poets and others of my friends."

"I am sixty-two years old, young man, and I beg to inform you that I consider the Asolando the most preposterous thing I have ever heard of in this most preposterous city. And from a casual glimpse of you I feel justified in saying that a man in your apparent physical health might be in better business than frequenting in midafternoon a shop that seems to be a remarkably stupid expression of twentieth century anaemia."

"Attendance here is not compulsory," I remarked defensively.

"If you imply that I must have sought the place voluntarily let me correct your false impression immediately. I dropped in here for the excellent reason that this shop is the seventh in numerical progression from Fifth avenue."

"You were not guided by any feeling of interest, then, but rather by superstition?"

"That remark is unworthy of a man of your apparent intelligence. I was born on the 7th of November, and all the great events of my life have occurred on the 7th of the month."

I was relieved to find that she accepted the tea and sandwiches the waitress had brought without parley. It is with shame I confess that in the first moments of my encounter I believed her capable of quarreling with a waitress, but she thanked the girl

tentive, absorbed. As she smoothed her gloves, Miss Hollister continued to speak in a low musical voice that was devoid of any of the quavers of age.

"On the day I reached my sixtieth year, Mr. Ames, I decided that my humdrum life must cease. The strictest conventions had guided me from earliest childhood. My experience of life had been limited to those things which women of education and means enjoy—or suffer, as you please to take it. Two years ago I chartered a yacht and cruised among the Lesser Antilles, enjoying many adventures. Later I crossed the Andes, and I have just returned from Switzerland, where I accomplished some of the most difficult ascents. I have a clipping bureau engaged to inform me of all rumors of hidden treasure and sunken ships, and I hope that of this something may come, as I retain a marine engineer and corps of divers and can leave at an hour's notice for any likely hunting ground. This may strike you as the most whimsical self-indulgence. Tell me candidly whether my remarks so affect you."

"If it were not that your benefactions of all kinds have given you noble eminence among American philanthropists I might be less biased in favor of the sort of thing you describe, but your gifts to orphanages, colleges, hospitals—"

"Ah!" she interrupted, "enough of that. Philanthropy in these times is only selfish exploitation, the recreation of the conscience stricken. But you see no reason why," she pursued eagerly, "if I wished to dig up the Caribbean sea in search of Spanish doubloons, I should not do so? Answer me frankly, without the slightest fear."

"I assure you, Miss Hollister, that such projects appeal to me strongly. I have often lamented that my own lot fell in these eventful times. As an architect I proved something of a failure; as a chimney doctor I lead a useful life, but the very usefulness of it bores me, and besides many people take me for a sweep."

"I dare say they do, for unfortunately many people are fools. But I am best upon adventure. My physician pronounces me good for ten years more of active life, and I intend to keep amused. If I were a young man like you I should crawl through chimneys no more, but take to the open road. I resent the harsh clang of these meaningless years. As I walked among the hills that lie behind the manner this morning I heard the bugles calling. I should like to ask you further as to your unusual profession, but errands summon me elsewhere. However, something tells me we shall meet again."

She rose in her swift, birdlike fashion and passed lightly down the room and through the door. She had left a dollar beside her plate to pay her check, which I noted called for only 40 cents. I glanced at the cashier's desk. The aureoled head had not reappeared, but immediately I heard a voice murmuring beside me. I had believed myself alone, and in my surprise I thought some wizardry had made audible one of the verses on the wall.

What of Rafael's sonnets, Dante's pictures—
It was she whose aureoled head I had marked earlier in the receipt of custom, the girl who had vanished as Miss Hollister appeared. She was not tall, and her eyes, I saw, were brown. She had clearly not climbed far the stairway of her years, but her serenity was the least bit disconcerting.

"Pardon me," I began, "but I am an ignorant Philistine, and cannot cap the verse you have quoted."

"There is no reason why you should do so. It is the rule of the Asolando that we shall attract the attention of



"The Asolando is denied to outsiders," customers when necessary by speaking of a line of verse. We are not allowed to open a conversation, no matter how imperative, with 'Listen,' or the even more vulgar 'Say.'"

"A capital idea, of which I heartily approve, but now that I am a waiting auditor, eager?"

"It's merely the check, if you please," she interrupted coldly. "My desk is closed, and the room will refuse further patrons for the next hour, as the executive committee of the Shelley society meets here at 4 o'clock, and the Asolando is denied to outsiders."

"This, then, is my dismissal? The lady who joined me here for a time left a dollar, which you will see, is some-

pleasantly, lifting her head with a smile that illumined her face attractively. Her demand for a cocktail had not been wholly convincing as to her sincerity, and I wondered whether she were not playing a part of some kind. She suggested pleasant and wholesome things.

In any event the impression was wholly agreeable. I had to do with a lady and a lady of no mean degree. The marks of breeding were upon her, and she spoke with that quiet authority that is the despair of the vain and vulgar. Her features were small and delicate, her ringless hands were perfectly formed and both face and hands belied the age to which she had so frankly confessed. She was more than twice my age, and there was not the slightest reason why she should not address me if it pleased her to do so, and her obsession as to the potency of the numeral seven was not in itself proof of an ill balanced mind. Musing thus, I reached the conclusion that this encounter was very likely the sort of thing that happened to patrons of the Asolando. My time has, however, a certain value, and I began to wonder just how I should escape. I was about to excuse myself when my companion suddenly put down her cup and addressed me with a directness that seemed habitual in her.

"I have formed an excellent opinion of your bringing up from the manner in which you have suffered my advances, if I may so call them. You act and speak like a gentleman of education. Will you kindly tell me the nature of your occupation?"

I produced one of my professional cards.

ARNOLD AMES,
Consultant in Chimneys,
Sult 92, Landon Building.

She read it aloud without glasses and mused a moment.

"This is very curious," she remarked, placing my card in a silver case she drew from her pocket. "This is very curious indeed. It was only yesterday that my friend General Glendenning was speaking of you. He told me that you had rendered him the greatest service in adjusting several fines in his country house at Shinnecock. My own fireplace doubtsless require attention, and you may consider yourself retained. I shall make an early appointment with you. You will find my name and residence sufficiently described on this card."

"Oh!" I exclaimed, bowing. "Any further introduction is unnecessary, Miss Hollister."

"The name is familiar? I recall that General Glendenning mentioned that you were related to the Ames family of Hartford, and your mother was a Farquhar of Charlottesville, Va. If you bear your father's name, I dare say it was he whom I met ten years ago in Paris. There is no reason therefore why we should not be the best of friends."

It was a kind fate indeed that had led me back to the Asolando, and introduced me to the aunt of Wiggins' inamorata. It may well be believed that I was immediately interested, at what in excess of her check. My own charge of 50 cents is so moderate that I cannot do less than leave \$1 also.

"Thank you," she replied, unshaken by my generosity. "The tips at the Asolando all go to the Sweetness and Light Club, which is just now engaged in circulating Matthew Arnold's poems in leaflet form in the jobbing district."

I bowed and had turned away when she arrested me with the line—
My good blade carves the casques of men.

I turned toward her. "Permit me to inquire," she asked, "whether the lady who joined you here expressed any interest in the life beautiful as it is exemplified in the Asolando?"

"I am constrained to say that she did not. She spoke of the Asolando in the most contemptuous terms."

The golden head bowed slightly, and a smile hovered about her lips. But her amusement at my answer was more eloquently stated in her eyes.

"I must explain that my sole excuse for addressing you is that we are required to learn, where possible, just why strangers seek the Asolando."

"In the case of the lady to whom you refer it was a matter of this being the seventh shop from the corner, and my own appearance was due to the idlest curiosity, inspired by enthusiastic descriptions of the Asolando's atmosphere and rumors of the cheapness of its food."

"The reasons are quite ample," was her only comment, and her manner did not encourage further conversation.

"May I ask," I persisted, "whether the Asolando's staff is permanent and whether, if I return another day—"

"I take it that you do not mean to be impertinent, so I will answer that my service here is limited to Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. On the other days Pippa is in the cash booth. My name at the Asolando is Francesca. Kindly write your name in the visitors' book at the door as you pass out."

There was no ignoring this hint. I thought she smiled as I left her.

(To Be Continued.)

There are a few boxes of stationery on our bargain counter. You will have to hurry if you want some while the price is so low.

Paul Stadelman takes subscriptions for any magazine or club of magazines at special rates.

FRANCO-GERMAN WAR PREDICTED

Teutons Fear Revenge of France.

PAPER GIVES GRIM WARNING

Asserts Two Nations Must Clash When European Trouble Occurs—Kaiser's Subjects Hoarding Millions—French Writer Points to Great Injury to Art by War Scare.

The semi-official Cologne (Germany) Gazette published recently an extraordinary leading article headed "The Michief Maker," in which it says:

"It will not be difficult for the German government to justify the necessity for the army increase if it will only speak out plainly and, without mincing words, indicate the point from which danger is threatened—as all the world realizes, from France."

The paper says nobody underestimates the gravity of the new conditions in the Balkans, but when the country is asked to make such heavy sacrifices chapter and verse must be given, and the government's finger must point to the precise spot from which there is immediate peril—that is, France. It adds:

"Never were our relations with our western neighbor so strained as today. Never has the idea of revenge been so openly flaunted. Never has it been so apparent that the French made their Russian alliance and their English friendship for the sole object of recapturing Alsace-Lorraine."

Franco-German War Certain.

"One thing is absolutely sure. Whenever the world catches fire the Germans will have to cross swords with the French. When that will happen nobody can tell."

Wholesale realizations of foreign securities, notably Canadian Pacific railway shares, are taking place in Germany in order to relieve the unprecedented famine of gold and money. The stock exchanges in Berlin and elsewhere in Prussia were closed on the centenary of the nation's rise against the Napoleonic oppressor.

To procure money investors are sacrificing their foreign holdings. This condition has been brought about primarily by the hoarding craze which has obsessed Germans since the outbreak of the war in the Balkans. It has not been lessened by the nervousness of their own government, as manifested by the gigantic army increase. The sum now hoarded by timid Germans is estimated at between \$12,500,000 and \$125,000,000. Merchants and manufacturers report that it is becoming increasingly difficult to obtain the payment of bills even from customers who have never before been delinquent.

Deficit in Banks.

Another aggravating factor is the deficit caused by the withdrawal of the immense balance which foreign banks formerly kept on loan in Germany.

A money famine can only be relieved from abroad. Gold must be imported. England was drawn on one week to the extent of \$1,500,000, and still heavier importations are in process of arrangement with the United States.

"It is the end of French culture," is cited as the opinion of Anatole France on the new French conscription bill in an interview sent to the London Daily News by Harold Spender from Paris. M. France is further quoted as follows:

"This addition to the yearly conscription comes on us just when France is moving forward with new energy both in science and industry. It will be a grave blow to all our higher life. Medicine especially will be injured, for the medicine of the army is not the medicine of the civil state. French science requires the time of its young students, and that will be gravely curtailed. The demand for another barracks year from all young Frenchmen imposed without exemptions will draw off the best from every field of life."

Is Heavy Blow to Art.

"It comes at a moment of great industrial development. It will check that development. It comes at a moment of expansion in our arts, especially in sculpture, and it will be a heavy blow. Sculpture is not practiced on the battlefield."

Mr. Spender declares that the militarist spirit is at present supreme in France and that other voices are not likely to be heard, for the present at least. The ordinary attitude of the Frenchman, he says, is one of resignation rather than aggression, but the cry "a Berlin," which resounded through the streets of Paris before 1870, has been raised again.

GIRLS TO WAR ON AIGRETS.

Philadelphia Students Pledge Themselves to Protect Heron.

Agreeing not to wear aigrets and to do all in their power to persuade others not to wear them, the Nature Study club of the girls' high school of Philadelphia recently prepared a petition urging that the sale of plumage of the snowy heron be prohibited in Pennsylvania.

The action was taken after the reading of a paper on the sufferings of the heron at a meeting of the club. The paper was prepared by Miss Irene Elbridge, teacher of English, and read by Ruth Gerhart, an officer of the club.

DUTCH WOMEN TO HAVE CELEBRATION IN MAY.

Their Progress From 1813 to 1913 to Be Shown at Amsterdam.

When the statesmen and the captains of industry in Holland were devising ways of celebrating this year the one hundredth anniversary of Holland's casting off the French yoke and regaining her independence it occurred to some of the other sex that they ought to have a show in both senses of the word.

So there was organized an exhibition to be held at Amsterdam. It was labeled "Woman—1813-1913."

This exhibition, to be open from May to October, will present a comparison of the Dutch women of a century ago with those of the present day and portray the progress made. There will be an old time middle class house, with its enormous kitchen and all the domestic accessories. Elsewhere will be a presentation of the accomplishments of the women of that day in art, music, sports and literature, their special work among the poor and the sick and as guardians of almshouses, orphanages and similar institutions.

To give an idea of the women of the working classes in the country as well as in the towns the home industries will be displayed, and it will be shown how women were overworked as seamstresses and as diamond workers and how some trudged in a treadmill like horses.

GAMECOCK THRASHES A MAN.

Rooster Thoroughly Disables Its Owner in a Battle.

Benjamin Sherman, a farmer living near Glen Gardner, N. J., came out second best in a battle with a game rooster recently.

The rooster early in the morning gathered three dozen eggs in a basket. As he came out of the coop Redney, a gamecock with a reputation as a fighter, flew at his face and inflicted a deep gash just under the right eye with a spur. Before he could recover Sherman was spurred again on the right side of the face near the mouth.

He attempted to catch the bird, but it sank a spur in his right wrist. In making a swing with the basket of eggs he lost his balance and fell to the ground. The bird then spurred him in the right leg several times.

A farm hand who heard Sherman's cries ran to the poultry yard and knocked the bird over with a spade. Sherman took to his bed.

CHINESE HONOR FOR WILSON.

Pair of Celestial Twins Named After Him and Marshall.

Friends of Low Fat Yuen, a prominent member of the Chinese Six companies, were summoned to Low's home, Oakland, Cal., recently to celebrate the arrival of two "honored ones." The "honored ones" are Woodrow Wilson Low and Thomas Riley Marshall Low. Woodrow weighs six pounds and Thomas five.

The twins were preceded by Alice Roosevelt Low, aged five; Helen Taft Low, aged three; Governor Pardee Low, aged eight, and Mabel Low, aged ten.

"What about William Jennings Bryan Low?" the father was asked.

"Maybe some time yet," he replied, smiling.

At the christening the guests all shouted "Man suey! Wey lo son gong mar shew!" which means "Long live Wilson and Marshall!"

HOUSTON HAD JOKE ON HIM.

Why His Old School Chum Fell "Cheap."

"No man ever felt cheaper than I did inauguration day," said Representative J. W. Ragsdale of South Carolina to a party of friends in Washington recently. "I was in school with David Franklin Houston, the new secretary of agriculture, but had not seen him in years until I ran upon him in the senate chamber."

"Hello, Frank," I said. "What are you doing in the senate chamber?"

"I was invited here," said Houston.

"That's strange," I replied. "I'm a congressman and can't get a ticket for this place before I'm sworn in."

"I went over to make a row with Senator Tillman about it."

"Why, that is one of the new cabinet members," said Senator Tillman.

QUEER WATER AFFECTS HAIR.

Florists Assert City Supply Has Tendency to Change Flowers' Color.

Florists of Evanston, Ill., assert that the city water, which is purified with hypochloride of lime, is changing yellow chrysanthemums to an ashen color, white roses to pink and carnations to almost every shade but the one they should be.

The commissioner of public works, with whom the florists took up the matter, said the water had nothing to do with changing the colors of the flowers.

The florists will make an effort to keep the city from placing lime in the water and assert they will have the aid of the women, who some time ago complained that the water was bleaching their hair.

Law Passed to Curb Hatpins.

Women in Massachusetts who do not cover the points of their hatpins with some device that will protect the public from injury on and after April 7 will be liable to a fine of not more than \$100. An act to this effect was signed by Governor Foss recently.