

The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By
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CHAPTER XIX. A Tryst With Hezekiah.

I WOKE the next morning to the banging of Miss Octavia's fowling piece. In spite of the crowding incidents of the day and night I had slept soundly, and save for a stiffness of the legs I was none the worse for my wetting. The service of the house was perfect, and in response to my ring a man appeared who declared himself competent to knock my dress clothes into shape again.

Cecilia met me at the foot of the stairs, looking rather worn, I thought. We were safe from interruption a moment longer, as her aunt's gun was still booming, and I followed her to the library.

"Please don't tell me you have failed," she cried tearfully. "That little book means so much, so very much, to us all!"

"Here it is, Miss Hollister," I said, placing it in her hand without parley. "I beg to assure you that I return it just as you saw it last. Please satisfy yourself that it has not been tampered with in any way. I have not opened it, and it has not left my hand since I recovered it."

She had almost snatched it from me, and she turned slightly away and ran hurriedly over the leaves.

"I thank you, Mr. Ames. Thank you! thank you! You have rendered me the greatest service, and I hope you were able to do so without serious inconvenience to yourself."

"On the other hand, it was the smallest matter, and instead of being a trouble I found the greatest pleasure in recovering it. Is it not possible that in throwing rejected correspondence cards into the waste paper basket that stands beside your desk—there is such a basket, is there not?"

"Yes," she replied breathlessly. "Is it not possible, then, that that little booklet, hardly heavier than paper itself, may have been brushed off without your seeing it?"

"It is possible, I must admit that it is possible, but—"

"The well trained maid who cares for your room, seeing scraps of paper in the basket by your desk, naturally carried it off. When I accepted your commission last night I went directly to the cellar, sought the bin into which waste paper is thrown and found among old envelopes and other litter this small trinket, which but for my promptness might have been lost forever."

"It doesn't seem possible," she faltered.

"Oh!" I laughed easily. "Possible or impossible, you could not on the witness stand swear that the book had not dropped into the waste paper basket precisely as I have described?"

"No, I suppose I couldn't," she answered slowly.

My powers of mendacity were improving, but her relief at holding the book again in her hand was so great that she would probably have believed anything.

"You see," she said, clasping the book tight, "this was given me for a particular purpose, and it contains a memorandum of greatest importance. And I was in a panic when I found that it was gone, for my recollection of certain items I had recorded here was confused, and there was no possible way of setting myself straight. Now all is clear again. I feel that I make poor acknowledgment of your service, but if at any time—"

"Pray think no more of it," I replied. And at this moment Miss Hollister appeared and called us to breakfast.

"If it is perfectly agreeable to you, Arnold, I will hear the story of the finding of the ghost at 4 o'clock, or just before tea. I have sent a telegram to Mr. Pepperton asking him to be present. He's at his country home in Redding and can very easily motor down. As no motors are allowed on my premises, he shall be met at the gate with a trap."

"You have sent for Pepperton?" I exclaimed.

"That is exactly what I have done, and as he knows that I never accept apologies under any circumstances he will not disappoint me. In addition he is reprimanding him for not telling me of the secret passage in this house. I have another matter that concerns you, Arnold, which I wish to lay before him. The new cook that Providence sent to my kitchen yesterday is the best we have had, Cecilia, and I beg that you both indulge yourselves in a second helping of country scrambled eggs."

A little later I met Miss Hollister in the hall dressed for her ride.

"Arnold, you may ride whenever you like. I may have forgotten to mention it. What have you on hand this morning?"



HEZEKIAH



"This morning and the days are long!"

"An appointment with a lady," I replied.

"If you are about to meet the owner of that Beacon street slipper I wish you good luck."

She was drawing on her gaudiest and turned away to hide a smile, I thought. Then she tapped me lightly with her riding crop.

"Cecilia's silver notebook was missing last night. She told me of her loss with tears. She has it again this morning. Did you restore it?"

"It was my good fortune to do so." "Then allow me to add my thanks to hers. You are an unusually practical person, Arnold Ames, as well as the possessor of an imagination that pleases me. You are becoming more and more essential to me. Cecilia approaches, and I cannot say more at this time."

When they had ridden out of the porte cochere I set off across the fields to keep my tryst with Hezekiah. The air had been washed sweet and clean by the rain of the night, and sky was never bluer. I was surprised at my own increasing detachment from the world. My days at Hopefield were the happiest of my life.

I reached the fallen tree that Hezekiah had appointed as our trysting place a little ahead of time and indulged in pleasant speculations while I waited. I was looking toward the hills expecting her to come skimming along the highway on her bicycle, when a splash caused me to turn to the lake. Dull of me not to have known that Hezekiah would contrive a new entrance for a scene so charmingly set as this! She had stolen upon me in a light skiff and laughed to see how her silent approach startled me. She dropped one oar and used the other as a paddle, driving the boat with a sure hand through the reeds into the bank.

"This morning, and the days are long!"

Such was Hezekiah's greeting as she jumped ashore. She wore a dark green skirt and coat and a narrow four-inch hand cravat tied under a flannel collar that clasped her throat snugly. A boy's felt hat, with the brim pinned up in front, covered her head.

"You seem none the worse for your wetting, Hezekiah. You must have been soaked."

"So must you, Chimneys, but you look as fit as I feel, and I never felt better. Did they catch you crawling in last night?"

"I didn't see a soul. You know I'm an old member of the family now. Nobody was ever as nice to me as your Aunt Octavia."

"How about Cecilia?" "Having found her silver notebook and given it back to her before breakfast, I may say that our relations are altogether cordial."

"Are you in love with her—yet?" asked Hezekiah carelessly, tossing a pebble into the lake. The "yet" was so timed that it splashed with the pebble.

"No; not—yet," I replied. "It will come," said Hezekiah a little ruefully, casting a pebble farther upon the crinkled water.

"You mean, Hezekiah, that men always fall in love with your sister." She nodded.

"Well, she's a good deal of a girl." "Beautiful and no end cultivated. They all go crazy about her."

"You mean Hartley Wiggins and his fellow bandits at the Prescott Arms?" "Yes, and lots of others."

"And sometimes, Hezekiah, it has seemed to you that she got all the admiration and that you didn't get your share. So when her suitors began a siege of the castle, whose gates were locked against you, you plugged the chimney with a trunk tray and played at being ghost and otherwise sought to terrify your sister's lovers."

"That's not nice, Chimneys. You mean that I'm jealous?"

"No. I don't mean that you are jealous now. I throw it into the remote and irrevocable past. You were jealous. You don't care so much now, and I hope you will care less!"

"That is being impertinent. If you talk that way I shall call you Mr. Ames and go home."

"You can't do that, Hezekiah." "I should like to know why not. If you say I'm jealous of Cecilia now or that I ever was I shall be very, very angry, for it's not true."

"No. You see things very differently now. You told me only last night that Cecilia might have Hartley Wiggins."

Assuming that she wants him! And you and he have been good friends, haven't you? You had good times on the other side. And while Cecilia was in town assisting Providence in finding your aunt a cook you went walking with him."

"I did, I did," mocked Hezekiah.

"Because Wiggy's the best of fellows, a solid, substantial citizen who raises wheat to make bread out of."

"And angel food and glazer cookies," added Hezekiah, feeling absently in the pockets of her coat. "No, Chimneys, you're a nice boy and you don't yell like a wild man when a feather duster hits you in the dark, but there are some things you don't know yet."

"I am here to grow wise at the feet of Hezekiah, daughter of kings. Open the book of wisdom and teach me the alphabet, but don't be sad if I balk at the grammar."

"I never knew all the alphabet myself," said Hezekiah dolefully. Then she laughed abruptly. "I was bounced from two convents and no end of Hudson river and Fifth avenue education shops."

"The brutality of that, Hezekiah, wrings my heart. Yet you are the best teacher I ever had, and I thought I was educated when I met you. But I had only been to school, which is different. Not until the first time our eyes met, not until that supreme moment!"

"Mr. Ames," Hezekiah interrupted in the happiest possible imitation of Miss Octavia's manner. "If you think that, because I am a poor lone girl who knows nothing of the great wide world, I am a fair mark for your cajolery I assure you that you were never more mistaken in your life."

"You oughtn't to mimic your aunt. It isn't respectful, and, besides, you have something to tell me. What's all this rumpus about Cecilia's silver memorandum book? Suppose we discuss that and get through with it."

"You see," she began earnestly. "I'm going to tell you something, and yet I'm not going to tell you. So far as you and I have gone you've been tolerably satisfactory. If I didn't think you had some wits in your head I shouldn't have bothered with you at all. That's frank, isn't it?"

"It certainly is. But I'm terribly fussed for fear I may not be equal to this new ordeal."

"If you fail we shall never meet again; that's all there is to that. Now listen real hard. You know something about it already, but not the main point. Aunt Octavia got father to consent to let her marry you off—Cecilia and me. Cecilia, being older, came first. I was to keep out of the way, and father and I were not to come to Aunt Octavia's new house up there or meddle in any way. While we were abroad I was treated as a little girl and not as a grownup at all. But, you see, I'm really nineteen, and some of Cecilia's suitors were nice to me when we were traveling. They were nice to me on Cecilia's account, you know."

"Of course. You're so hard to look at it must have been painful to them to be nice to you—almost like taking poison! Go on, Hezekiah!"

"You needn't interrupt me like that. Well, as part of the understanding, and Cecilia agreed to it—she thought she had to for papa's sake—she was to marry a particular man. Do you understand me—a particular man? Aunt Octavia gave her a little notebook—she bought it at a shop in Paris at the time Cecilia consented to the plan—and she was to keep a sort of diary so that she'd know when the right man turned up. Now we will drop the notebook for a minute, only I'll say that Cecilia was to keep the book all to herself and not show it to any one, not even to Aunt Octavia, you know, until the right man had asked Cecilia to marry him. Now who do you suppose, Mr. Ames, that man is?"

(To Be Continued.)

Most disfiguring skin eruptions, scrofula, pimples, rashes, etc., are due to impure blood. Burdock Blood Bitters as a cleansing blood tonic, is well recommended. \$1.00 at all stores.

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.

"SAFETY FIRST" LECTURE DRAWS A GOOD CROWD

Frank B. Thomas of the Burlington
Addresses Large Audience
at the Lecture Car.

From Wednesday's Daily.

The safety lectures, held at the car of Mr. F. R. Thomas in the Burlington shop yards yesterday drew out an attendance of some 170 of the employes of the company and everyone attending was deeply interested, as was shown by the careful attention given the speaker, as well as the close scrutiny of the views presented. There has been about 800 employes of the Omaha division already who have attended the lectures in the car in lots of from fifty to sixty, and appearances indicate that this division is going to surpass the attendance record at present held by the Chicago division of the road.

Since Mr. Thomas commenced delivering his safety lectures to Burlington employes, the records show that he has cut the number of accidents fully one-third and he hopes and expects to still reduce this. For instance, a few years ago a large number of accidents were due to employes stepping on nails. In those days if a brakeman, switchman or other employe passing through the yards saw a board lying on the ground and it was full of nails, the points sticking up, he paid no attention to it. Now this is changed and when a Burlington employe discovers a board, such as referred to, he, no matter if he is in a hurry, turns it over, or else breaks off the nails so that they will not puncture the foot of some man who happens along later.

Another cause of many injuries to trainmen when Mr. Thomas took hold of the safety work was by brakemen on freight trains swinging onto the front end of the cabooses when the trains were in motion. The old-time brakemen did this and consequently when new men went onto the road, they thought they could do the same. The result was that many of them missed their hold and fell beneath the wheels. Mr. Thomas, by his lectures and by showing his pictures has entirely broken up this practice. Now every brakeman waits until he can swing onto the rear of a caboose. By his work, he has reduced the hazard and has made railroading on the Burlington an occupation that is about as safe as any in the country.

Mr. Thomas, who is a very talented and earnest speaker along the lines of the safety work, has been kind enough to furnish us a little poem of his own that hits the nail on the head in regard to the carelessness of many at railroad crossings, as follows:

Bagley's Error.
Poor old Bagley, he got his'n,
'Cause he failed to stop and look
and listen.

When he came to where the R. R.
crosses

He paid no 'tention to his hosses,
But let 'em lope right on the
track—

From where he's gone there's no
comeback!
If an elephant tramples you,
that's no fun,

But an engine's a regular son-of-
a-gun.

In the language of Pat, "Let's be
safe, be gorry,
And thin not a soul will nade to
be sorry."

PUPILS OF MRS. EHLERS GIVE VERY FINE RECITAL

At the home of Mr. and Mrs. Charles Manners Saturday afternoon a most enjoyable recital was given by the pupils of Mrs. H. O. Ehlers of Omaha, formerly Miss Jennie Tuie of this city, and the occasion was most pleasing, both to the teacher and the guests. The program, every number of which was very much enjoyed, was as follows:

- The Chimes.....Estelle Geis
- Cornflower Waltz.....
-Gwendolin Wampler
- Star of the East.....Mildred Nelson
- The Water Mill.....
-Josephine Manners
- Duet—Wedding Reception
Polka.....
- Gwendolin Wampler, Estelle Geis,
Moon Winks.....Harold Manners
- Prince Imperial Gallop.....
-Ruby Winscot

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- In May (a).....
- Daisy Chains (b).....
- Mamma's Walk (c).....
-Mildred Nelson
- Black Hawk Waltz.....
- Frolic of the Frogs.....
-Harry Winscot
- Trip to Niagara.....Harold Manners
- Basket of Roses.....
- Fly Away.....
-Ruby Winscot, Ina Crook.
- Once in a Purple Twilight.....
- At Eventide.....Mrs. H. O. Ehlers
- Buzzing Bumble Bee.....
-Josephine Manners
- General Grant's Grand March.....
-Ruby Winscot
- Bussy's Lullaby.....
- Bardie's Singing School.....
-Mildred Nelson
- Beautiful Star of Heaven.....
-Gwendolin Wampler
- Falling Waters.....Estelle Geis
- Duet—Dreaming Waltz.....
- March of the Brave.....
- Gwendolin Wampler, Estelle Geis
- Song.....Ora Bella, Marvin Allen

Attention!

To all members of McConahie Post No. 45: This is to advise you that at a recent meeting of the Post it was unanimously decided not to attempt an effort to get up the usual Memorial day program. The burden of doing this in recent years, and the expense was too great for the ageing members of the Post to bear, without too great a sacrifice.

When the Post in years gone by had the active, patriotic and moral support of the community in recognition of the day, the programs gotten up for the occasions were enjoyed with patriotic fervor; but within the past few years there has been that lack of assistance and expression of patriotism, from outside the post, that was necessary to make the day what it should be in this community, and by reason of these conditions the Post has decided to only attempt to observe the day in accordance with its rules and regulations, and the members of McConahie Post and of the Woman's Relief Corps will meet on Memorial day, May 30th, at their rooms in the court house, at 9 o'clock a. m., and proceed in carryalls to the cemetery, there to plant the flag and strew flowers on the graves of our departed comrades. All old soldiers, whether members of the Post or not, also soldiers in the Spanish war and Sons of Veterans are not only invited, but earnestly requested to join in the Memorial day exercises. Anyone having

flowers for the occasion will deliver them at the court house. By order of McConahie Post No. 45. J. H. Thrasher, Commander.

YOUNG MEN'S GLEE CLUB ENTERTAIN THEIR FRIENDS

From Wednesday's Daily.

The Young Men's Glee club, which has been practicing during the past winter under the direction of Mrs. Mae Morgan, gave a recital last evening at the League room in the Methodist church to a number of their invited friends and the occasion was one of much enjoyment to those who had the pleasure of attending. The young men certainly made a splendid showing and the organization is one that the city should feel very proud of, as the young men composing it are possessed of much high musical talent, and under the careful instruction of Mrs. Morgan, are becoming one of the best Glee clubs in this part of the state, and it is hoped the young men will give a public recital in the near future.

OMAHA CADETS GO TO MISSOURI VALLEY

The proposition of securing the encampment of the Omaha High school cadets' encampment here in June will not be held in Plattsmouth this year, as the Commercial club was informed by the officer in charge of the matter at Omaha. In twenty-four hours after the matter was brought to the attention of Secretary Wescott he called up the captain in charge of the arrangement of the encampment and was informed that a contract had been made with Missouri Valley to take the boys there. The club did its utmost to secure the encampment for this city, but as the contract was made it settled the matter. The captain stated they would have liked to have come here if the proper arrangements could have been made in time.

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