

The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By
MEREDITH NICHOLSON

CHAPTER XXIII.

The Ghost of Adoniram Caldwell.

WE gathered close about her as she knelt beside the box. My hand shook as I held my candle, and I think Miss Octavia was the only one in the room who showed no nervousness.

We all exclaimed in various keys as the light fell upon the open chest. The musty odor of old garments greeted us at once. The box was well filled, and its contents were neatly arranged.

"It's his ragged regimentals!" cried Cecilia, as we unfolded an officer's coat of blue and buff, sadly decrepit and faded, and he was not a British soldier at all, but an American patriot.

Time and service had dealt even more harshly with an American flag on which the thirteen white stars floated dimly on the dull blue field. It had been bound tightly about a packet of papers which Miss Octavia asked Pepperton to examine.

"These are commissions appointing a certain Adoniram Caldwell to various positions in the Continental army. Adoniram had the right stuff in him. Here he's discharged as a private to become an ensign, rose from ensign to colonel and seems to have been in most of the big doings. For gallantry in the recent engagement at Stony point, on recommendation of General Anthony Wayne—by Jove, that does rather carry you back!"

Half a dozen of these documents traced Adoniram Caldwell's career to the end of the Revolution and his retirement from the military service with the rank of colonel. A sealed letter attached to these commissions next held our attention. It was addressed "To Whom It May Concern."

"I suppose it concerns us as much as anybody," remarked Miss Octavia. "What do you say, gentlemen? Shall we open it?"

We all demanded breathlessly that she break the seal, and we were soon bending over her with our lights. The ink had blurred, and in spots rust had obliterated the writing:

I, Roger Hartley Wiggins, some time known as Adoniram Caldwell—

"Hartley Wiggins?" we gasped. And I felt Cecilia's hand clasp my arm.

Miss Octavia continued reading, and as she was obliged to pause often and refer illegible lines to the rest of us I



"It's his ragged regimentals!" cried Cecilia.

have copied the following from the letter itself, with only slight changes of punctuation and spelling:

I, Roger Hartley Wiggins, some time known as Adoniram Caldwell, having resumed my proper name and being about to marry and having begun the construction of a habitation for myself wherein to end my days, truthfully set forth these matters:

My father, Hiram Wiggins of Rhode Island, having supported the royalist cause in our late war for independence and answered by my friendliness to the patriots, and he, with my brothers and sister having returned to England after the evacuation of Boston, I joined the Continental troops under General Putnam on Long Island in July, 1776, serving in various commands thereafter to the best of my ability to the end. My father has now returned to Rhode Island and has, I learn, been making inquiries touching my whereabouts and condition, so that I have every hope that we may become reconciled. Yet as my services to the country were against his wishes and caused so much harshness and heartache, and being now come into a part of the country where I am unknown, I am decided to resume my rightful name, that my wife and children may bear it and in the hope that I may myself yet add to it some honor. . . .

Nor shall my wife or any children that may be born to me know from me (I have had my name changed to avoid this) that I ever was a traitor. . . .

and announce I received an Adoniram Caldwell at various times and from various personages of renown, both civilians and in the military service. I place them under my house now building, where I hope in God's care to end my days in peace. I would in like case make like choice again.

Ten lines following this were wholly illegible, but just before the date (June 17, 1789) and the signature, which was written large, was this:

God preserve these American states that they endure in unity and concord forever! We had all been moved by the reading of this long lost letter, and Miss Octavia's voice had faded several times.

"Mr. Wiggins once told me that his great-grandfather had lived somewhere in Westchester county, but I fancy he had no idea that Hopefield was the identical spot," remarked Miss Octavia. "It seems incredible, and yet I dare say the hand of fate is in it."

"Oh, it's so wonderful; so beyond belief!" cried Cecilia, reverently folding the letter, which, I observed, she retained in her own hands.

"It's wonderful," added Miss Octavia promptly, taking the sword, which Pepperton had with difficulty drawn from its battered scabbard, "that even a discerning woman like me could have been so mistaken. I recall with humility that last Fourth of July, at Berlin, I reprimanded Mr. Wiggins severely because his family had not been represented in the war for American independence. By the irony of circumstances it becomes my duty to present to him the very sword that his admirable great-grandfather bore in that momentous struggle."

Several copies of New York newspapers, half a dozen French gold coins, the miniature of a woman's face, which we assumed to be that of Roger Wiggins' mother or sister, were briefly examined; then by Miss Octavia's orders we carefully returned everything to the chest. Several packets of letters we did not open.

"Arnold," she said when we had closed the chest, "will you and Mr. Pepperton kindly carry that box to my room? No servant's hand shall touch it, and I shall myself give it to Mr. Wiggins at the earliest opportunity."

We had lost track of time in those hidden rooms, preserved by the whim of one man that the secret of another might be discovered, and found with surprise, after the chest had been carried to Miss Octavia's apartments, that it was after 7 o'clock. We had been in the hidden rooms for more than three hours.

"We shall have much to talk about tonight, and I fancy we are all a good deal shaken. It's not often we receive a letter from a dead man, so we shall admit no callers tonight unless, indeed, Mr. Wiggins should chance to come," announced Miss Octavia. "The next time Hartley Wiggins visits this house he shall come as a conquering hero."

"I hope so," replied Cecilia brokenly. We were still at dinner when the cards of Dick and the other suitors I had last seen at the Prescott Arms were brought in; but Wiggins made no sign, and I wondered.

The man who looked after my needs handed me a note the next morning which added fresh hazards to Cecilia's already perilous plight.

"Left with the gardener before 8 o'clock by a boy from the village. Said it was most confidential, sir."

I waited till he had left the room before opening it. It read:

Gooseberry Bungalow, Before Breakfast. Dear Chimneys—Pep stopped here yesterday to see B. H. Ho and C. old pal. Watch him. Where's Wig? H. H.

The information she conveyed was startling enough. We had been dealing with a company of suitors outside the barricade, now came warning of the presence of a strange knight within the gates who greatly multiplied the perils of the situation. The compact among the suitors at the inn was a thing of the past, and I now expected them to exercise all the ingenuity of which desperate lovers are capable in pressing their claims. The fact that both Wiggins and Pepperton were old friends of mine did not make my task easier. I not only felt it incumbent on me to prevent Dick, the holder of the clew, from taking advantage of it, but knowing Cecilia's own attitude of mind and heart toward Wiggins I wished to save Pepperton the pain of rejection if it could be done.

But what did Hezekiah mean by the question with which she ended her note? If Wiggins, smarting under Cecilia's treatment of him the day before, had quit the field here was a pretty how-d'-ye-do. Miss Octavia's refusal to countenance telephones made it necessary for me to leave Hopefield to learn what had become of Wiggins, and I realized that I must act promptly if I saved the day for him. His conduct first and last had been spiritless, and I was out of patience with him. It seemed impossible to formulate any plan amid these multiplying uncertainties. If Wiggins had decamped Dick knew it and would lay his plans accordingly. I felt that it was base ingratitude on Wiggins' part to ask me to watch his interests while he went roaming indifferently over the country. One or two consoling reflections remained, however—Dick believed me to be a suitor for Cecilia's hand, and this doubtless caused him considerable uneasiness, and he did not know that Pepperton, whose acquaintance with Cecilia antedated the European flight, had to be reckoned with. I wished Pepperton had kept out of it.

Breakfast that morning was interminably long. Miss Octavia was never more thoroughly anxious, never more drolly inadvertent. She attacked Pepperton for all the evils in American architecture and in particular took him to task for some house he had built at

Newport which she pronounced the most hideous pile of marble on American soil.

When we left the table at about half past 10 Miss Octavia insisted that we must visit the kennels. A friend had



"I'm going to be married."

just sent her a fine Alredale, and she wished to make sure the kennel master was treating the dog properly. Later we were all to ride.

I made haste to excuse myself, saying that personal matters required attention.

"Certainly, Arnold; you shall do as you like. Mr. Pepperton is a difficult bird to catch, so we hope for you at luncheon, and of course we expect you for dinner."

Pepperton looked at me inquiringly. I judged that he had known Miss Octavia a good many years—the tone of their intercourse was intimate, and yet he plainly was at a loss to understand just how I came to be so thoroughly established in her good graces. I confessed that as I glance back over these pages it looks odd to me!

As I paced the hall waiting for a horse to be saddled, Pepperton led me out on the terrace above the garden.

"I'm bursting with a great secret, old man. I'm going to be married."

"What?"

"I'm going to be married."

I grasped a chair to support myself. This was almost too much. Could it be possible that Hezekiah had miscalculated the list of rejections in the silver bound book, or that Cecilia herself had been deceived? Pepperton misread my agitation and with a hearty laugh clapped me on the shoulder.

"Oh, I'm not intruding on your preserves, old man! Cecilia is the second finest girl in the world—that's all. I'm engaged to Miss Gaylord of Steckbridge. I'm telling a few old friends, in advance of the formal announcement to be made next week at a dance the Gaylords are giving."

I crushed his hand in both my own and, seeing that he misconstrued the fervor of my emotion, I hastened to set myself aright.

"You're a lucky dog as usual, Pep. You don't understand about Cecilia Hollister. It's not I—I'm not in the running at all, but Hartley Wiggins! I'm here trying to help him score."

"What's this? You're here to represent Wiggy?"

"Well, he didn't exactly send me here, but when I came I found that Wiggy wasn't playing the game with quite the necessary zipology. There's more required than appears—a little of the dash and snap of the old adventurers—the ready tongue, the eager, thirsty sword!"

Pepperton pursed his lips and looked me over carefully with a twinkle in his eye.

"You are contributing those elements! You are Octaviaized—is that it?" Pepperton laughed until the tears came.

"I prefer Hollisterized as the broader term. Brother Bassford has it, too, and there's always Hezekiah!"

"Ah, Hezekiah the unpredictable! I knew there was a skirt fluttering somewhere. I saw her yesterday—stopped to see Bassford, who's a good old chap. Hezekiah of the teasing eyes was whitewashing the chicken coop, and Michelangelo couldn't have done it better."

"Pep," I said, lowering my voice, "if you love me keep close to Cecilia all day. You're an engaged man and in practice. Give an imitation of devotion. Keep her out of doors—keep male human beings away from her. Don't fall me in this. I've got to pull off the greatest coup of my life today. There's a band of outlaws hanging round here who will propose to Cecilia the first chance they get, and they must NOT. Wig's got to speak before night or lose out forever. No—not a word of explanation. You've got to take my word for it."

"I'll be the goat. Go ahead, but build a fire under Wiggins. I can't stay here forever."

Pepperton's engagement smoothed out one wrinkle, and I felt sure that I could trust him as an ally. The groom was holding my horse in the portico, and I mounted and rode away to the Prescott Arms.

I found Ormsby, Shallenberger, Arbutnot, Henderson, Hume and Gorse glumly sitting in a semicircle before the hall fireplace. Deepest gloom pervaded the inn. I have rarely seen mel-

ancholy so darkly stamped upon the human countenance. They turned indifferently and gazed as they recognized me. Shallenberger alone rose and greeted me.

"I hope there is no bad news," he said chokingly.

"Bad news?" "I mean Miss Hollister—Miss Cecilia. We were all deeply grieved last night to hear of her sudden illness. There's always something so terrible in the very name of diphtheria."

My wits had been so sharpened by my late adventures that I readily accounted for these false tidings. Dick was absent. Dick alone would have been equal to this diabolical plot for keeping his rival suitors away from Hopefield. The despair in those faces taxed my gravity severely.

"It is extremely sad, but the first diagnosis was erroneous," I answered. "I think it more likely to prove to be chicken pox when the truth is known."

"Not diphtheria?" "No immediate danger of diphtheria, I assure you," I replied, "though of course with winter coming on and all that, one must be prepared for the worst."

While he repeated this to the others I sought the clerk, who promptly handed me a note which Wiggins had left late the previous afternoon, to be delivered in case I called. He had gone to spend a day or two with Orton, the playwright, who was at his country house, in the hills beyond Mount Kisco, rehearsing a new piece, in which a friend of Hartley's was to star. I gained the telephone booth in one jump, and in five minutes I was bawling wildly into Orton's ear. I had known him well in the Hare and Tortoise, and he answered my demand for Wiggins with the heart breaking news that Hartley had ridden off with some other guests in the house, Orton didn't know where.

"I threw them out. I've got to rewrite my third act. I don't care whether they ever come back," boomed Orton's voice.

"If you don't send Wiggins back to me at Hopefield as fast as he can get there, my third act is ruined."

"What?"

"Tell Wiggins to come back on the run. Tell him the world's coming to an end in five minutes."

"I'll be glad to get rid of him," snapped Orton, in the hurried tone of a man whose third act has witted in rehearsal.

(To Be Continued.)

FORMER PLATTSMOUTH PEOPLE ATTEND FUNERAL OF MRS. HELPS

From Wednesday's Daily.

A letter has just been received by Miss Bernice Newell from Miss Ruth Houseworth of Long Beach, California, telling of the incidents of the terrible disaster that occurred there on May 24th. The report of the death of Arthur Helps at the time of the accident that resulted in the death of Mrs. Helps was entirely without foundation. Mr. Helps, as soon as he received news of the destruction of the pier, hastened to the scene in his automobile and assisted in removing the dead and injured in an endeavor to find the body of his wife. He made several trips to the hospital with the injured and was just passing the place where the men were working on the ruins when his wife's body was carried out. The funeral of Mrs. Helps was held at the Episcopal church in Long Beach Tuesday, May 27, and was attended by the entire Plattsmouth colony in that city. The services were very impressive and the floral tributes magnificent, including a large wreath of lavender and white centurias from the Elks lodge of Plattsmouth. The doctors who examined Mrs. Helps stated her death was due to heart failure, as she was practically uninjured by the collapse of the pier and had only a small bruise on her wrist.

MRS. MAUDE KASPAR IS MARRIED IN COUNCIL BLUFFS

Among the marriage licenses issued yesterday in Council Bluffs we note that of Anton Hromak and Mrs. Maude Kaspar of Omaha. Both of the contracting parties formerly resided in this city, where Mrs. Kaspar conducted a bakery for some time, later selling out to Fred H. Mumm, the present owner, and the groom was employed as a baker in the establishment while here. Mrs. Kaspar removed to Omaha several months ago, and the wedding was not wholly unexpected to those intimately acquainted with the parties.

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JUDGE BEESON ISSUES TWO MORE JUNE WEDDING LICENSES

The office of County Judge Beeson has been rushed for the past few days by the number of young people desiring to enter into the bonds of wedlock, and to all the judge has granted the necessary permit for them to realize their happiness.

This morning license was issued to George A. Engelkemeier of Nehawka and Miss Mary Albert of this city, who were married by Rev. Steger of St. Paul's church.

Yesterday George H. Culavan, aged 24, of Missouri Valley, Iowa, and Miss Lillian Gatewood, aged 19, of Brooklyn, were called at the office and secured the necessary permit to wed and proceeded to the home of Rev. W. L. Austin, where they were united in the bonds of holy wedlock.

CIVIL SERVICE EXAMINATION HELD ON SATURDAY, JUNE 29

There will be an examination in the civil service department at this city on Saturday, June 28, for the purpose of filling a vacancy in the rural route out of Murdock, in this county. The same day a similar examination will be held at Weeping Water, and those taking the examination will be eligible to fill any vacancy that may occur in any of the rural routes of the county. The examinations will be held at the postoffice buildings here and in Weeping Water and anyone desiring to take part can secure information on the subject by calling at the postoffice.

Bilious? Feel heavy after dinner? Bitter taste. Complexion sallow? Liver perhaps needs waking up. Doan's Regulets for bilious attacks. 25c at all stores.

A Fine New Auto.
The Journal editor and wife were given a very pleasant auto ride in the fine new Inter-State car of our excellent friend, Major Hall, on Monday evening, in company with Mr. and Mrs. Hall and the genial salesman and representative for this fine car, Mr. Hugh Cecil, of the firm of Warga, Cecil & Manners. Major is the proud possessor of one of the finest cars on the market, and the way he is learning to handle it he has cause to be proud. The Inter-State is a good one, and the one Major has is a beauty.

THOUGHT YOUNG MAN HAD "SLIPPED ONE OVER" ON FRIENDS

Last evening as the shades of eventide were falling over the peaceful serenity of Main street one of the popular young men of the city was observed wheeling a strange-looking machine up and down the sidewalk and much excitement was created among his friends as, on close inspection, it was disclosed to be a baby carriage containing a sleeping infant. Fear was aroused that the young man had been successful in "slipping one over" on his friends, and the matter was at once investigated by a number of the more curious, and it was decided that the youth in question was just performing a friendly office for one of his friends and was not the proud possessor of the sleeping infant.

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

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