



Claimed as husband by seven women and he has never seen one of them

BERNARD HALSCH, one of the wealthiest and most popular bachelors in Buda-Pesth, is claimed by seven women as their husband, each producing undoubtedly genuine certificates of marriage, with the name of the husband signed in almost exact duplicate of Halsch's handwriting.

The charge that Halsch, supposed to be one of the wealthiest and most desirable unmarried men in the Austro-Hungarian capital, member of a dozen exclusive clubs, a shunner if not a lover of women, was a polygamist created a sensation. For a time it was charged that Halsch, while suffering from some peculiar form of dementia, had traveled about Austria and Hungary seeking whom he might wed.

But the disclosures that followed were even more startling. It was discovered, if never effectively proved, that Halsch's greatest enemy, Mirik Lofshy, had garbed himself as Halsch, impersonated the brilliant young bachelor, and married all the women in order to cause trouble for the man he hated.

Wed Seven Women in Three Days.

The exposure of the extraordinary cheat and the remarkable means employed by Lofshy to reveal Halsch on Halsch reveal Lofshy as the champion weaver and marrier of the world. He was three months at his wooings, three days of continuous weddings; then for a month, until the facts began to come out, he remained floating over the approaching discomfiture of his rival. He had planned to escape detection, but an astounding accident betrayed him, and he fled, leaving the deserted wives to share with Halsch the gibes and sympathies of their friends.

The beginning of the trouble was in the parliament building, in the salle de Gala—the great hall that is under the dome of the building and in which the magnates and deputies meet between sessions. Lofshy was an ardent Kosutist, and Halsch, while not a politician, was a frequent visitor of the house and a liberal in views. After a stormy scene in the diet one day the two met in the salle de Gala and an argument resulted in which Halsch, a bitter wit, held his Magyar opponent up to ridicule.

The affair was considered unimportant, but the ridicule bit into the heart of the Kosutist, and he determined upon revenge.

He knew, in common with almost every one else in Buda-Pesth, that Halsch was extremely wealthy, an old bachelor, and an alleged woman hater, so he determined upon his line of revenge. He studied carefully the dress, manners, and customs of Halsch; he visited Halsch's beautiful apartments, on a busy boulevard during his absence and took pains to note everything.

Made Himself Up Like Enemy.

Then he went to Paris, secured an expert maker of theatrical costumes, took him to Buda-Pesth, and together they arranged the costume and makeup of Lofshy until Halsch himself would have had difficulty in telling whether he was Halsch or Lofshy was Halsch.

Then, secure in his new personality, Lofshy, bearing cards stolen from Halsch's rooms, set out upon the most remarkable series of courtships the world ever has known.

That evening he astounded two young women—Frances Girinze and Tizza Ankrimoy—by calling upon them at their homes. In each case he presented the card of Halsch and requested an interview with the mother. In each case he stated that he had become smitten with the charms of the daughters and desired to become formally a suitor, requesting permission to meet them and pay his attentions.

Also, in each case, he requested that secrecy be preserved both to his sake and the sake of the young women until the outcome of his advances became known. The mothers, in a flutter of excitement over the visit from the rich and desirable bachelor upon whom many mothers, even those of the nobility, had lavished their efforts in seeking to entrap him, promised—and he met the girls.

He spoke with them formally, requested permission to call again, and, receiving it, departed.

The strangest feature of it all, according to people acquainted with the women, is that the secret was kept not only by them but by their entire families—one of the girls going so far as to intimate that she was to be married to a wealthy German when she was twitted by her friends about her mysterious caller.

Perhaps they all feared to lose the "big fish" that they thought they had hooked.

At any rate they kept the secret—and aided Lofshy in his plot.

How He Managed the Courtships.

It is thought that at that time he intended only to entangle Halsch in an embarrassing but harmless predicament; but in the next cases he was more careful, and in but one other case did he dare confine his movements to Buda, selecting the other four victims from the young women of Pesth.

Within the next week he had placed himself on the same standing with Bertha von Stobbie, Szara Molagyi, Rosetta Montan, Desira Csall, and Tessa Karniszsa.

Four of these women were young, under 17 years of age, and of good families, and three were "old maids," one over 50. Three of them were handsome, two fairly good looking, and two ugly—positively ugly, besides old—and one had, in earlier life, been mixed up in an unfortunate love affair.

The courtship continued in secret for months, and five nights a week and two afternoons Lofshy donned his disguise and made his calls, continuing to plead for secrecy, drawing a picture of what his friends, who considered his bachelordom chronic, would say.

Early in May he brought matters to a climax. He proposed to the seven women, pledging them to marry him secretly and to keep the secret until the day he should set for the public announcement. Each one accepted, each one gave a pledge to keep their families in ignorance. He sealed the seven engagements with seven kisses and went away to his apartments in high glee.

Secret Revealed by Misstep.

It was there that he made his first and fatal misstep, the one that revealed his secret. In changing from his own clothes into his disguise Lofshy had forgotten his door key. His man servant was out and he could not gain an entrance. He strolled down to the Grand hotel, engaged a room for the night, and retired. The next morning he was forced to wear his disguise in the busiest streets. Two men met him and stared at him. One stopped him and said, "Why, Halsch, I thought you were in Paris."

"No," responded Lofshy. "Business forced me to remain here until this evening." The other man was a member of the secret police. He knew Halsch was in Paris, and, wondering why he had returned so suddenly, idly followed Lofshy and saw him enter the Lofshy apartments. He was puzzled about the matter, but, as there appeared to be nothing wrong, he merely made a note of what he had seen and forgot all about it—until later.

Lofshy, as future developments showed, had a reckless disregard of the consequences of his acts and took wide chances of discovery. Perhaps, so the police think, he became alarmed over the magnitude of his offense and would rather have had it discovered before he completed it—although the results showed that he was ready to do almost anything in order to square accounts with the man whom he regarded as his deadly enemy.

That he was not caught seems strange, for he purchased seven rings, each identical, when he became engaged to the girls—and he purchased from the same jeweler seven wedding rings exactly alike. The jeweler was scored by the police for failure to notify them, but he explained that he knew Lofshy well and had no reason to suspect there was anything wrong.

The dates of the weddings were May 4, 5, and 6. Unfortunately for him, Halsch returned to Buda-Pesth on the evening of May 3.

Pledged His Brides to Secrecy.

The weddings began the next morning. Lofshy then married Frances Girinze, the ceremony being performed by a Roman Catholic priest with whom arrangements had been made weeks in advance. After the wedding Lofshy pledged his bride to keep the secret until the evening of Friday, May 12, when she was to come to the banquet room of the Grand hotel, where he would proclaim her his wife in the presence of all his friends at a grand banquet.

That afternoon, before a Magyar dignitary, he was married to Desira Csall, and in the evening, before a Lutheran minister, he married Bertha von Stobbie.

The next day he married Rosetta Montane and Tizza Ankrimoy, and the following day he took as his wives Szara Molagyi and Tessa Karniszsa.

That the seven weddings could have been kept secret even for a day was considered strange, and it is asserted that Lofshy paid large fees to those performing the ceremonies on condition that they keep the secret for several days and make no report, claiming that he was arranging a big surprise, and by this he managed to allay whatever suspicions they may have had.

He kissed each of his seven brides farewell at the altar and obtained from each the promise that they would appear on Friday evening at the hotel banquet room to be introduced as his wife.

His aim achieved, Lofshy discarded his disguise and settled back to hear the roar of laughter and the storm of censure fall upon his foe. His revenge was about to be consummated, and he was happy. The ridicule which Halsch had brought upon him was nothing to what would fall upon Lofshy, and besides he expected legal complications and possibly the utter ruin of the reputation of the strictly moral old bachelor who for years had been the model of the capitalist.

And, in dense ignorance of all this, Halsch was arranging for a big banquet in honor of his forty-eighth birthday, to be held at the Grand hotel on the evening of May 12—of which Lofshy had heard when he arranged for his wives—or Halsch's wives—to meet him there.

Also there was a buzz of expectation in seven households, where the seven brides had confessed to their seven families, pledging them all to secrecy, and there was much preparation for the event of Friday night. The families smiled in anticipation of a surprise when they read in one of the papers a little announcement of the coming banquet of Halsch.

Friday night came. The grand banquet hall of the great hotel, one of the greatest in all the world, was ablaze with light. Halsch and his friends had gathered for their "stag" feast. The merriment was at its height at 10:30 when a page, hastily entering, made his way to where Halsch was seated at the head of the long table along the sides of which his friends were gathered. The boy muttered something.

Halsch shook his head angrily. The boy said something else. Halsch tried to smile. Suddenly he scented a joke and, leaping to his feet, said: "I drink to the joke—let it go on."

His friends were astonished.

"Bring my wife in," said Halsch, laughing. "I guess the joke is on me."

"Some of my friends have sent up a woman to pretend she is my wife," he explained.

The friends around the table roared with delight.

"Bring her in. Let us drink her health," they shouted. The page ushered "her" in—seven of "her."

Meeting of the Seven Brides.

The scene that followed was indescribable. The brides wept and broke down from shame. Halsch implored, entreated, denied, and asseverated. He declared he had married no one. Each of the women declared she had married him and each was ready to attack the other six.

The friends roared and grew angry, then thoughtful. Nobody could understand what had happened.

For half an hour the banquet was broken up. The women, threatening legal prosecution, had started to their homes. Seven families were ready to murder Halsch at sight. The whole of Buda-Pesth rang with the story.

Halsch was in a peculiar position. The more he denied the more scorn and laughter he brought upon himself. People laughed until the tears ran down their cheeks, then grew angry at the thought of the shame thrust upon the seven women.

Halsch's guilt seemed proved. The priests and ministers and courts that had sanctioned the marriages identified him. The families of the girls told of his months of courtship. He retaliated by proving an alibi at the times they said he called. He swore he was in Paris at a certain time about the first of May. The friend who had accused him on the street vowed he was not, because he had met him on Klosterburg avenue and spoken with him.

That almost caused a duel. Every time he said he was out of town some one appeared to prove that he wasn't. Ten friends swore that he was with them on Margit Isle on the same night that five members of the families of two girls swore he called at their homes.

Practical Joker Is Discovered.

The case looked bad. Lofshy was enjoying his revenge. Legal proceedings were instituted when one day Jonkiry, the detective, suddenly remembered. He consulted his notebook. That afternoon he called on Lofshy while Lofshy was out. What he discovered made his suspicion a certainty.

Then he called on Halsch and stated the matter clearly. And Halsch remembered his quarrel with the Magyar. Some one warned Lofshy just in time, and while the police were on their way to his house he fled. While they were searching the city he crossed the frontier.

The next day the truth of the matter was heralded through the city, and on that same day Halsch himself called on each of the seven women; and to each of them he offered to do anything in his power to repair the damage except to marry them. That he could not do, both on account of the law and because he had become engaged to Krage Litsine—but he promised to give another banquet and invite them all.

The entire population of the twin cities of the Danube was aroused to sympathy by the cruel deception practiced on the seven women, but the seven themselves appear glad that they escaped the villain.

They are arranging to attend Halsch's banquet in their honor and to laugh down the situation into which they were cast by Lofshy's deception.

But all over Buda-Pesth the men who know Halsch refer to him as "Solomon" or "Brigham Young" or "Bluebeard."