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The Siege of the Seven Suitors

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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SYNOPSIS

Harley Wiggin is in love with Cecilia Hollister. His friend Arnold Ames meets an elderly lady at the Anolando tea. She is Cecilia's Aunt Octavia, an eccentric woman of wealth. She invites Ames to her home. Ames is fascinated by Francesca, a tea room girl.

Ames sees Wiggin meeting Cecilia secretly at Hopfield Manor. Aunt Octavia is a great believer in the spiritual influence of No. 7. Ames sees mysterious men watching the house. He hears of Hezekiah, Cecilia's sister. Wiggin calls upon Cecilia. The chimney smokes mysteriously.

The house is said to have a ghost. Cecilia tells Ames she is in deep trouble and asks him to urge Wiggin not to call upon her again.

Wiggin regards Ames as a rival. Aunt Octavia dislikes Wiggin because his ancestors were Tories. Wiggin is interested in both Cecilia and Hezekiah. Cecilia has nine suitors.

Ames meets Francesca in an orchard and learns that she is Hezekiah's sister. Aunt Octavia shows Ames the pie parlor. Cecilia fears Hezekiah loves Wiggin. Her nine suitors call.

Cecilia rejects Professor Hume and makes a record book. The butler tells Ames a British officer's ghost haunts the house.

Ames finds Cecilia and her father, Bassford Hollister, fencing on the roof. Hezekiah's suitors are told to give up. Hezekiah vanishes mysteriously through the wall. Hezekiah tells Ames she is prohibited from visiting Hopfield Manor.

Ames seeks plans of the house, but finds Aunt Octavia has just secured them. Cecilia's suitors are informed of the news. Ames assures Cecilia that Hezekiah is not in love with Wiggin. Ames makes another effort to see the ghost.

Ames learns that Hopfield Manor secretly incloses an old Revolutionary house. Apparently the ghost is Lord Arrowood, a rejected suitor.

The chimney smokes again. Hezekiah is the mischief maker. Ames helps Hezekiah to elude her Aunt Octavia. Hezekiah mysteriously disappears.

Cecilia, in great distress, asks Ames to find her silver notebook, which has been taken from her room. Ames suspects Hezekiah.

Hezekiah accuses the suitors with a Jack-o'-lantern. Ames tells Ames that Hezekiah is a rejected suitor.

CHAPTER XVII. Loss of the Silver Notebook.

THE memoranda of my adventures at Hopfield Manor fall under two general headings. On the one hand were the ghost and the library chimney, on the other the extraordinary gathering of Cecilia's suitors. As I followed at Miss Octavia's side she seemed to have dismissed the ghost and the fractions chimney from her mind. Her humor changed completely. As in the morning, when unaccountably abandoning her habitual high flown speech, she had asked me about Cecilia's silver notebook, she seemed troubled, and when we had reached the second floor she paced up and down in unworldly preoccupation.

"Let us sit here a moment," she said, indicating a long davenport in the broad hall. For the first time her manner betrayed weariness. She laid her hand quietly on my arm and looked at me fixedly. "Arnold," she said, "you will let me call you Arnold, won't you?" she added plaintively, and never in my life had I been so touched by anything so sweet and gentle and kind.

"Arnold, if an old woman like me should do a very foolish thing in following her own whims, and then find that she had probably committed herself to a course likely to cause unhappiness, what would you advise her to do about it?"

"Miss Hollister," I answered, "if you trusted Providence this morning to send you a corps of servants when yours had been most unfortunately scattered by ghosts or rumors of ghosts, why will you not continue to have confidence that your affairs will always be directed by agencies equally alert and beneficent?"

"I don't know," she said, but I have found out a lot of things without being told, so tell me nothing! Remember that I have something quite remarkable, startling even, to show you tomorrow. I have even overcome, you know, the obstacle you placed in the way of my discoveries by sending in ahead of me this morning for the plans of the house."

I watched her narrowly, but she was in no wise discomfited.

"Well, I burned them the moment Hilda brought them back," she laughed. "I had faith in you, and I wanted not to manage it all for yourself. I rather guessed that you would go to Pepperton. That was when I still believed."

"But you must go on believing. Make-believing is the main cornerstone and the keystone of the arch of the happy life."

"You are sure you are not mocking a foolish old woman?"

"You are the wisest woman I ever knew," I asserted, and my heart was in it.

"I believe you have persuaded me, but Cecilia?"

"Leave it to me; trust me; leave upon me. I assure you that all will be well."

"She bent her head and yielded herself to reverie for a moment. Then she sprang to her feet in that indescribably light, graceful way that seemed at least fifty or two years from the reckoning and was herself again. "Arnold Ames," she said, laughing a little but sizing up at me with unmistakable confidence and liking in her

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