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The Siege of The Seven Suitors MEREDITH NICHOLSON

Ames seeks plans of the house, but finds unt Octavia has just secured them. Ce-ilia's suitors are jealous of Ames.

mes assures Cecilia that Hezekiah in love with Wiggins. Ames make other affort to safety he shoet

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

I reached the fallen tree that Heze kinh had appointed as our trysting.



aus. You don't care so much now, and I hope you will care less!"

"That is being impertment—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 jesious of Cerilia now or that I ever was I shall be very. very angry, for le's not true."

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

Assuming that she wants him! And

your aunt a cock you went walking with him."

"I did, I did!" mocked Hezekiab.
"And why do you suppose I did?"
"Because Wiggy's the best of fellows, a solid, substantial citizen who raises wheat to make bread out of."

"And angel food and ginger cookles," added Hezekiab, 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 grammis."

"I never knew all the alphabet my-

"The brutality of that, Hezekiah, wrings my heart. Yet you are the best teacher I ever had, and I thought I had been to school with the heart. Yet you are the best teacher I ever had, and I thought I had only been to school, which is different. Not until that supreme our ever met, not until that supreme moment"—

er more mistaken in your life."
"You oughtn't to mimic your aunt.

It im't respectful, and, besides, you have something to tell me. What's allthis rumpns about Cecilia's silver
more and the book of Suppose we discuss that and get through with it."
"You see," she began enrestly, "I'm
going to tell you. So far as
hat and get through with it."
"You see," she began enrestly, "I'm
going to tell you. So far as
hat and get through with it."
"You and I have gobe you've been tolcus that and some with in your bend I
in a holdn't have bothered with you at
all. That's frank, isn't it?"
"It certainly is. But I'm terribly
fused for fear I may not be equal to
this new ordeal."

If. "If you fail we shall never meet
again; that's all there is to that. Now
listen real hard. You know something
and that it all there is to that. Now
listen real hard. You know something
and the title and, but not the main
point. Aunt Octavia got, father to consent to let ber-marry us off-Cecilia.
And me. Cecilia, being older, come
first. I was to keep out of the way,
and father and I were not to come to
our
two meddle in any way. While we were
abroad I was treated as a liftle gir
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 travelling. 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-simost like taking
poison! Go on, Hezekiah!"

To needn't interrupt me like that
the nice to you-simost like taking
poison! Go on, Hezekiah!"

To needn't interrupt me like that
the bought it at a shop in Paris at the
time Cecilia greed to it—she thought she
had to for papa's sake—she was to
marry a particular man. Do you inderstand me—a particular m

"He spread his arms to clasp her there Just as she vanished into air, And to his bosom, warm and rough, Drew the gold reeds close enough.
"I don't remember the rest," she broke off. "But there: That's a pipe

without the reeds, but the sight of per, sitting on the fallen tree beside the lake, beating time with her foot, her head thrown back, her eyes half closed in a mockery of rapture at the shrill, wheezy uncertainties and ineptitudes she evoked, thrilled me with new and wonderful longings. A heart a spirit

she evoked, thrilled me with new and wonderful longings. A heart, a spirit like hers would never grow old. She was next of kin to all the clusive, fugitive company of the elf world. And on such a pipe as she had strung together beside that pond to this day Sicilian shepherd boys whistle themselves into tune with Theocritus!

"Take it." she said. "I can't tell you more than I have, and yet it is all there, Chinneys. Read the riddle of the reeds if you can."

I took the pipe and turned it over carefully in my hands, but I fear my thoughts were rather of the bands that had fashioned it, the "ingers that had danced nimbly upon the stops. "There are seven reeds—seven," she affirmed.

bles over the surface of the water while I pondered, and I deliberated long, for one did not like to blunder before Hezekinh. Then I jumped up and called to her. "One, two, three, four, five, six—

"One, two, three, four, five, six-seven! Not until the seventh man offers himself shall Cecilia have a husband. Is that the auswer?"

For a moment Rezekiah watched the widening ripples made by the casting of her last pebble. Then she came back and resumed her seat.

"You have done well, Chimuey Man, and now I'll not make you guess any more, though I found it all out for myself. When Aunt Octavia gave that memorandum book to Cecilia I knew it must have something to do with the seventh man. You know I love all Aunt Octavia's nonsense because it's precisely the sort of thing that would have occurred to my aunt. And it was in the bargain, too, that she herself should not in any way interfere or try to influence the course of events. It should be the seventh suitor, willy nilly. And I suspect she's been a little secred too."

ready to throw the whole scheme over last night. Your naughtiness had got

on her nerves."
"You missed the target that time."
"You missed to target that time." and I think she has really been afraid
Sir Pumpkin Wiggins would catch me.
Now...I didn't roam my aunt's house
i that the has really been afraid
sir Pumpkin Wiggins would catch me.
Now...I didn't roam my aunt's house
i that the hadron getting into some
scrape about that seventh suitor plan.
I found out by chance how to get into
Hopefield and about the hidden stair
way and the old rooms tucked away
there. Papa really discovered that.
A carpenter in Katonah who worked
on the house helped to build papa's
bungalow, and he told us how that
ruin came to be there. That dyapapsia cure man, who also lumortalized himself by inventing the ribleas
umbrella, was very supersitious. Ha
believed that if he built an entirely
new house he would die. So he had
his architect build around and retain
those two rooms and that stairway of
a house that had been on the ground
almost since the Revolution. Mr. Pepperton, the architect, humored him,
but hid the remains of the relic as far
out of sight as possible."
"Trust Pep for that: And he did it

and Hezeklah flung aside her coat. The breeze caught the ends of her ties and snapped them behind her. She was wholly absorbed in her tirsk; and no boy could have managed a pocket knife better. The first reed she made a trifle longer than her hand. The succeeding ones she trimmed to gradentied lessening lengths, till seven in all had been cut, and then she notched them.

"Seven," she murmured, laying them neatly in order on her knee. "I remember the right number by a poem I read the other day in an old magazine."

She reached down and plucked several long leaves of tough grass with which she began to bind the reeds together, repeating:

"Seven,gold reeds grew tall and slim Close by the river's beaded brim. Syrnix, the maiad, fflitted past: Pan, the goat hoofed, followed fast, "It will be easier," said Hezeklah, "It you hold the pipes while I tie them." I found this propinquity wholity agreeable. It was pleasant to sit on a log beside Hezeklah. It seemed no far cry to the storied Mediterranean and Pan and dryads and maiads, as Hezeklah bound her reeds to the music of couplets. There was no self consciousness in her recitation. She seemed to be telling of something that she had seen herself an hour ago.

"He spread his arms to clasp her there Just as she vanished into air," And to his bosom, warm and rough.

"And to his bosom, warm and rough.

And to his bosom, warm and rough.

That's a good idea. Dick is insufferable. I bope you haven't counted wrould be a continued and ready and re

"That's a good idea. Dick is insuf-ferable. I hope you haven't counted

"As we were saying, about the note-book," she resumed, "the fifth man has already been respectfully declined. The dateg of the proposals are written in the notebook, so I learned from the book that Mr. Ormsby, Mr. Arbuthnot and Mr. Gorse had proposed on the steamer. Professor Hume, you know, tried his luck at Hopefield, and Lord Arrowood must have stopped Cecilia as she was riding to the station on my bicycle yesterday morning. His goose



"He stopped to tell papa goodby spoke very highly of you. Papa and you are the only gentlemen he met in

you are the only gentlemen he met in America. But now we come to Mr. Wiggins."

"We do; and why in the name of all that is beautiful and good hasn't he tried his luck?"

"Because, knowing Cecilia's admiration for him," replied Hezekinh demurely. "I have kept him so diverted that he hasn't been able to bring himself to the scratch."

"You ddu't want him to blunder in

"You didn't want him to blunder in as the first, fourth or sixth man?" Hezekiah gravely nodded her pretty

head.
"And while you were engaged in this

"That is like Cecilia. She's fine, and wouldn't cause me trouble for any-thing." and there was no doubt of Hezeklah's sincerity.
"But now that I see the light and un-

derstand all this, how can we make sure that Wiggy will be on the spot at the right moment? While we sit here he may be the sixth man! I might

he may be the sixth man! I might take care of Wiggy by asking Cecilia to marry me, being careful to have him appear Johnny on the spot when I had been duly declined."

"Um! I shouldn't take any chances if I were you," she replied, feigning to look at an immginary bird in a tree top, "for if you had counted wrong and were really the seventh man she would have to accent you!" have to accept you!"
"Hezekish!"

"Hezekish!"
"Oh, I really didn't mean what you thought I meant. We don't need to discuss it any more. That's the order I've arranged for you," she knawered and set her lips sternly.
"But, my dear Hezekish, by what means can this be effected? I don't done tell him the combination by

"But, my dear Hezekish, by what means can this be effected? I don't dare tell him the combination he's playing against or sit on bim until bis hour strikes."

"Certainly not; you mustn't tell him or anybody else. You know the plan; but you're not supposed to, and no-body must know I've meddled. Meanwhile Cecilia must expose herself to proposals at all times. Aunt Octavia's heart would be broken if she thought Providence had been tampered with. She likes Wiggy well enough, except that his ancestors were all Tories, and he can't be a Son of the Revolution."

She rose and pointed to her coat.

"Drop it into the boat for me, Chimners. We meet in funny places. don't we? Papa expects me for luncheon, and I must row hack and get my bicycle. You? No, you can't go along; you've got a lot of thinking to do, and you'd better be doing it."

A few minutes later, as I swung along the highway toward the Presectt Arms, I saw Cecilia Hollister riding toward me at a lively gallop. She crossed the bridge without checking her horse, and then, with a hurried giance over her shoulder, she pointed with her crop to a hyway.

turbed as T did essed bet.

"I hadn't expected to meet you. I thought you rode off with your aunt toward Mount Kisco."

"We did, but on our way home Aunt Octavia stopped to call on a friend, and as I didn't feet in a meet-for visits this morning. I rode on alone. I was walking my horse in the road beyond Bedford, just after I left Aunt Octavia, when who should ride up beside me hay Mr. Wirgins. He had evidently been following Ue."

She expit ted the to express surprise, and with the information that Heze.

was thinking rapidly and fearfully. If

be a rejected and hopeless man, but I was unwilling to believe that this had happened.

"Won't you tell me what happened in the road when Hartley rode up beside you?"

"Oh, nothing happened; really, nothing: Nothing could have happened for the excellent reason that I ran away from him. It wasn't what he did or said, it was the fear of what he might say!"

"If it had been Mr. Dick who had the highway, you would not have minded in the least, Miss Hollister. Ian't that the truth?"

CHAPTER XXI. ECILIA'S hand, that had rested on the pommel of her saddle, dropped to her side, and she stood erect, her eyes wide with

"I mean exactly what I have said.
If it had been that strutting young
philosopher from the west you wouldwell, you would have allowed him to
any what was in his mind. Am I not

frawing away the better to observe

such manner that Wiggins should be-come the seventh man. Ceclifa could not always run away from him withrelieve your mind without parleying further, I will say to you that I know out violating the terms of her aunt's stipulation, and it was unlikely that she would attempt further to guide or thwart the pointing finger of fate. I everything."

"Then Aunt Octavia must have told you, and that seems incredible. It was distinctly understood"—
"Your aunt told me nothing. Not by

"Your aunt told me nothing. Not by words did any one tell me."
"Not by words?" she asked, eyeing me wonderingly and clearly feeling that I might be playing some trick upon her. "Then can it be that Hezekinh-but not Hezekinh doesn't know."
"Trust Hezekinh for not telling secrets," I answered evasively. "Give me condit for some imagination. The

crets," I answered evasively. "Give me credit for some imagination. The air of Hopefield is stimulating and in the few days I have spent in your aunt's bouse I have learned much that I never dreamed of before,"

"I don't understand it. You are wholly inexplicable."

"I am the semiconders of the structure of the situation, which Hezelian had given into my keeping. It was well on toward 2 o'clock when I approached the inn. Before long the suitors would depart for their afternoon call at the manor, which was an established event of the day. Just so I

wholly inexplicable."

"I am the simplest and least guileful of beings, I assure you. Yet I have done some things here not in the slightest way related to chimney doctoring and something else I expect to do for which I believe you will thank me through all the years of your life."

"Ah, if you really know, that is possible!" she sighed wearily. "I am very tired of it all. I was very foolish ever to have agreed to Aut Octavia's plan.

to have agreed to Aunt Octavia's plan. You have seen those men. Any one of them might, you know." And she shrugged her shoulders impatiently.
"Any one of them might be the seventh man. There, you see I do know. And I mean to help you."
She was immensely relieved. There was no question of that. Gratitude shone in her eyes, and then as I marveled at their beautiful dark depths fear suddenly possessed them. The change in her was startling. I caught a fleeting glimpse of Hartley Wiggins riding slowly with bowed head toward the ins. to have agreed to Aunt Octavia's plan

It was plain, that glimpse of him had toughed Cecilia's pity. If I had doubted the sincerity of her regard

"But there is always"—she began, then ceased abruptly and lifted her head proudly—"there is always Mr. Wiggins' attitude toward my sister. Not for anything in the world would I cause her the slightest unhappiness. You must see that, now that you know

ber."

I laughed alond. Cecilia's concern for
Hezekiah's happiness was so absurd
that I could not restrain my mirth for
a moment. Displeasure showed promptly in Cecilia's face.

ry in Gectia's race.

"Pardon me, but maybe you don't
quite understand Hezekiah," I said,

"Is it possible, then, that you do?"
she inquired coidly, "I imagine your
opportunities for seeing her have not

opportunities for seeing her have not been numerous."

"Well, it isn't so much a matter of seeing her, when you've read of her all your life and dreamed about her. She's in every fairy story that ever was writ-ten; she dances through the mythol-ogies of all races. Here is the kingdom of the pure in heart. Her mind is like a beautiful bright meadow by the sea and her thoughts the dipping of swal-low wings on lightly swaying grasses." Cecilia's manner changed, and she

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homeward, and Wiggins had been near the brink only that morning. It was unlikely that any of the active candi-Sunday - - - 2.00 The Semi-Weekly **Observer**

established event of the day. Just as I was about to enter the gate I was ar-rested by an imperious voice calling, and John Stewart Dick came running Tues. and Friday - 1.00 toward me. To my surprise he greeted me cordially, even offering his hand. "You thought you would come after all. Well, I'm glad you did. I've decid-

ed that there should be peace between was compensated for by a tremendor

relied little upon any arrangement ef

fected among the fullors to stand to-gether. Hume had already found a chance to speak. Lord Arrowood had bitten the dust and turned his face

dignity.

"You have several times addressed me, Mr. Anies, in a spirit of contumely which I have hesitated to punish by the chastisement you deserve, but I am willing to let bygones be bygones. I had intended to offer myself to Miss Hollister this afternoon, with every hope of success, but I yield to you. My only request is that you inform me

He clapped on his cap and folded his arms, clearly satisfied with the ex-pressions of surprise to which my feel-ings betrayed me. Could it be possible ignorant? Whether he had reasoned from some remark thrown out by Miss Octavia as to the influence of seven in the affairs of life and her application of that fateful principle choice of a husband for Cecilia, I could not guess, but assuming that he had caught that clew, he might readily enough have managed the rest. I must not allow him to see what I suspected.

"My dear professor, there's an an-cient warning against the Greeks bear-ing gifts. You must give me time to inspect the horse." "Are you questioning my good faith?"
"Be it far from me! I'm a good deal tickled, though, by your genial assumption that if I offered myself to this lady I should be declined

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

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