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DR. KING'S New Life Pills

The Siege of The Seven Suitors

By MEREDITH NICHOLSON

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SYNOPSIS

Hartley Wiggin is in love with Cecilia Hollister. His friend Arnold Ames meets an elderly lady at the Asolando tea room. She is Cecilia's aunt Octavia, an eccentric woman of wealth. She invites Ames to Hopefield Manor. Ames is fascinated by Francesca, a tea room girl.

Ames sees mysterious men watching the house. He bears of Heseliah, 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 visits Cecilia. Ames is interested in both Cecilia and Heseliah. Cecilia has nine suitors.

Ames meets Francesca in an orchard and learns that she is Heseliah. They are nine sisk hais cross a stile.

Aunt Octavia shows Ames the pie panter. Cecilia's sister Heseliah loves Wiggin. Her nine suitors call.

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

Ames finds Cecilia and her father, Bassford Hollister, fencing on the roof. Heseliah is the unknown to Aunt Octavia.

Hollister vanishes mysteriously through the hall wall. Heseliah tells Ames she is prohibited from visiting Hopefield Manor.

Ames seeks plans of the house, but finds Cecilia has just secured them. Cecilia's suitors are jealous of Ames.

Ames assures Cecilia that Heseliah is not in love with Wiggin. Ames makes another record in his silver book.

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

The chimney smokes again. Heseliah is the rejected suitor. Ames helps Heseliah to elude her Aunt Octavia. Heseliah mysteriously disappears.

Cecilia, in great distress, asks Ames to find her sister Heseliah, which has been taken from her room. Ames suspects Heseliah.

Heseliah accuses the suitors with a Jack of spades, speaks slightly of Wiggin and gives Ames the notebook.

Ames is again belligerent. It was again occurred to him that he might know as much as he, but at any rate he grinned. It was a saturnine grin.

"I'm starting to death at the door of an inn, and you must excuse me. Have you seen Hartley Wiggin lately?"

"I have indeed. He's taken to lonely horseback rides. He's off somewhere now. He hasn't the stamina for a complete like this. One by one the autumn leaves are falling," he added, with special intention, "and I have given you your chance."

"Thanks, light bringing Socrates from the lands of the Gogolias. For so much courtesy I shall take pleasure in reading all your posthumous works. Let us cease being absurd."

With this he left him and entered the hall rattled office. It was really a pleasant looking room, unspotted by the usual office paraphernalia. Dick had followed close behind, and as he paused, hearing voices raised angrily in the dining room beyond, he turned to him for an explanation. As the suitors had been the only guests of the inn since their advent, he attributed the commotion to strife in their own ranks.

"You'd better take a look at those fellows. I've quit them—quite out of it. Remember that," said Dick.

The dining room door was slightly ajar, and he flung it open. Ormsby, Shallenberger, Henderson, Hume, Gorse, and Armitage had been engaged with cards at a round table in an alcove, but some dispute having apparently risen, they stood in their places engaged in acrimonious debate. As near as he could determine, some one of them—I think it was Ormsby—wished to abandon the game, which had been undertaken to determine in what order they should be permitted to pay visits to Hopefield in future, the calls to be followed having grown intolerable. They were so absorbed that they failed to note his appearance.

"It's no good, I tell you," cried Ormsby. "There's no fairness in this unless all take their chances together."

say interest in the room, and he led me further into the room, and hearing my step they all turned and faced me. Dick had continued at my side, but the black looks they sent our way



They Failed to Note My Appearance.

were intended, I thought, rather for me. My appearance roused Ormsby to a fresh outburst.

"You're responsible! If you hadn't forced yourself upon the ladies at Hopefield these wouldn't have been any of this trouble!"

"You're only an impostor anyhow. You went to the house to fix a chimney. Her face, her figure, her voice conveyed to me that you were engaged to spend the rest of your natural life there," protested Henderson.

Then they dropped me and assailed Dick.

"We'd like to know what you expect to gain by dropping out. You got fed mighty sudden," bellowed Ormsby.

Gorse and Henderson paid similar tributes to the apostate, whose melancholy grin only deepened.

Henderson rallied for a final shot at me.

"A good horsewhipping is what you deserve," he cried, leveling his finger at me.

"Gentlemen," I began, not without inward quaking, "you have spoken loud, naughty words to me, and in reply I must say that your vocal efforts suggest only the melodies of the braying jackass and that your manners, to speak mildly, are susceptible of considerable improvement."

"You leave this neighborhood within an hour," boomed Ormsby, and in his efforts to free himself from his chair it fell backward with a crash that echoed through the long room.

"Then summon the coroner by telephone, for I shall not be taken alive," I answered quietly, trying to recall my youthful delight in Forthos, Athos and Aramis.

"Come along, let us put him out," Henderson was saying in an aside to Ormsby.

"You were playing a game here for a stake not yours for the winning," I continued. "Now I suggest that you shuffle the pack—your three, who are so full of valor—shuffle the pack, I say, and draw for the Jack of clubs. Whoever is the fortunate man I shall take pleasure in pitching through your very charming casement."

"Agreed," cried Henderson, and the three hung themselves into their chairs.

The alacrity of their consent had unnerved me for a moment. Dartagnan, I was sure, would have fought them all, but I consoled myself as the cards rattled on the bare table with the reflection that, considering the fact that I had never in my life had a violent hand on a fellow being, I was conducting myself with admirable assurance.

My weight has always hung well within 130, and physicians have told me that I was incapable of taking on flesh or muscle. Any one of these men could easily toss me through the window I had indicated as a means of their own exit.

Shallenberger caught my eye and indicated with a slight jerk of the head that I had better run before it was too late. The painstaking care with which Henderson had fallen upon the cards was disquieting, to put it mildly. Dick leaned in to the ribs and offered to hold my cut.

"It will not be necessary," I replied carelessly. "Tender your services to the other gentlemen. Come, gentlemen—hurry. Let us not waste time here."

"Ormsby turns up the card you've a dead man," Dick was muttering gloomily.

"They're all alike to me," I replied loudly. "Mr. Ormsby is very beautiful. I shall hope not to disfigure him permanently." But as I spoke my tongue was a wabby dry clapper in my mouth.

I was bending over now, watching the three men pick up the cards, and once, when I misread the Jack of spades for the Jack of clubs, a shudder passed over me. They were down to the last card, and Ormsby's hand was on it.

"Gentlemen," I cried, pointing to the card, "what trick is this? Can it be possible that you have been trifling with me in a fashion for which men have died the world over by sword and pistol?"

"Kindly explain, Arnold, the nature of this difficulty," Miss Octavia commanded.

"Simply this, Miss Hollister. If I had not the ink offered to bet that these three gentlemen in order. It was agreed that the man who drew the Jack of clubs from the pack with which they had been playing should be my first victim. They have shuffled their own cards and have drawn the whole pack and there is no Jack of clubs in the pack! The only possible explanation is one to which I hesitate to apply the obvious plain Saxon term."

"It dropped out, that's all! You don't dare pretend that we threw out the Jack to the ink offered to bet that these three gentlemen in order. It was agreed that the man who drew the Jack of clubs from the pack with which they had been playing should be my first victim. They have shuffled their own cards and have drawn the whole pack and there is no Jack of clubs in the pack! The only possible explanation is one to which I hesitate to apply the obvious plain Saxon term."

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straged the plans I obtained from your office so that Arnold might be fully tested as to his capacity for managing the most difficult situations."

When Miss Octavia first referred to me as Arnold, Pepperton raised his brows a trifle; the second time he glanced me inquiringly. He seemed greatly amused by Miss Octavia's sarcasm, but her amiable attitude toward me clearly puzzled him.

"It takes a good man to uncover a thing I try to hide. I said nothing to you, Miss Hollister, about the retention within the walls of this house of parts of an old one that formerly occupied the site for the reason that I thought you might refuse to buy the estate. The gentleman for whom I built Hopefield was superstitious, as many men of advanced years are, as to the building of a new house, and as the site he chose for this house, I had to be compelled as to construct this new one—which is the most satisfactory I have built—in such manner that enough of the old should be kept intact to soothe his superstitious soul with the idea that he had merely altered an old house, not built a new one. As it is the architect, I thought to yield to such caprices. I obeyed him strictly. So there are two rooms of an old farmhouse hidden under the east wing, and it amused me once I had got into it to preserve part of the old stairway and connect the retained chambers with the upper part of this house. I had to patch the original stair, which was only one flight, with discarded lumber from the old house, but I flatter myself that I managed it neatly. I even saved the old nails to avert the wrath of the evil spirits. When the umbrella and dyspepsia of the man died—for he did die, as you know, and he was very sensitive about his superstitions. Most of the laborers on that part of the job were brought from a long distance, and I supposed they never really knew just what we were doing. I might have used a ghost's secrets should be sacred; but let us now proceed to the hidden chambers," said Miss Hollister, bidding without further ado.

She summoned Cecilia, to whom we explained matters briefly, and at Pepperton's suggestion the four of us went directly to the fourth floor, so that Miss Octavia might see the most effective convenience in the most effective manner possible.

My awkward pen falters in the attempt to convey any idea of Miss Octavia's delight in Pepperton's revelation. She kept repeating her admiration of his genius, and to protest that she was not a student of architecture, I was forced to accept meekly. When in broad daylight Pepperton found and pressed the spring in the upper hall, and the hidden door opened with a softness that indicated a real position of its own dramatic value, Miss Octavia cried out gleefully, like a child that witnesses the manipulation of a new and wonderful toy.

"Beyond any question," she kept asserting, "beneath the chambers of the old house down there we shall find the bones of that British soldier who perished here, or it is even possible that the skeleton of the Continental army. She kept repeating her admiration of his genius, and to protest that she was not a student of architecture, I was forced to accept meekly. When in broad daylight Pepperton found and pressed the spring in the upper hall, and the hidden door opened with a softness that indicated a real position of its own dramatic value, Miss Octavia cried out gleefully, like a child that witnesses the manipulation of a new and wonderful toy.

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"I beg of you to exercise the greatest care, gentlemen. If bones are interred here we must do them no injustice," warned Miss Octavia.

By this time we all, I think, began to believe that the flooring might really have been cut in this corner of the old room to permit the hiding of something. The old plank chattered so borbly in their joints, but after I had loosened one the others came up quickly, and the smell of dry earth filled the room. Pepperton had, at Miss Octavia's direction, brought a chisel and crowbar from the bathroom in the cellar, and he stood ready with these when I tore up the last board, disclosing an oblong space about five feet long and slightly over three feet wide.

We were all excited now. The edge of the bar struck repeatedly against something that resisted sharply. It might have been a root, but when Pepperton shifted the point of attack the same booming sound answered to the prodding. Pepperton now thought it might be only an empty cask or a box of no interest whatever, but Miss Octavia, hovering close with a candle, encouraged us to go on.