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We are selling off our stock of Men's Suits in order to make room for our Spring stock, which will be coming in soon.

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Men's Patent Leather Blucher Bals; regular $4.50-$5.00, now - **$4**

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J. J. SCRIVEN & SONS.

dec31—tw

The Siege of the Seven Suitors

BY MEREDITH NICHOLSON.

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CHAPTER XXV.
The Seventh Man.

HEZEKIAH bade Wiggins exchange horses with her, and while he was readjusting the saddle girths I explained to Hezekiah the situation at Hopefield and told her of Dick's scamper across the fields.

"There's no use fooling with this thing any more. I'll take Wiggy to the house and lock him up until I've been numbered six. It's safest."

"Not much it isn't. I don't intend that Cecilia shall have the pleasure of refusing you."

"I'd like to know why not. It's only to fill the gap."

"Oh," said Hezekiah, "that would be an embarrassment to me all the rest of my life. Listen carefully. Take Wiggy in by the back way and give him a picture book to look at. Leave Cecilia alone on the terrace when you're all ready and see what happens. If Dick's on his way to the house he's going to do something, and he must feel the edge of my displeasure. I owe him a few on general principles."

"What does all this mean? You say there's nothing wrong at the house!" began Wiggins as we left Hezekiah and started toward Hopefield.

"Nothing whatever the matter. Everything perfectly all right, but you've got to keep mum now and do what I tell you. I've worked hard for you, old man, and when it's all over I'm going to send you a bill for professional services. Come."

I urged my horse to his utmost, and Wiggins rode steadily beside me. The fright Orton had given him had done my friend good, and I felt that I was dealing with a live man at last.

"I'll tell you all about this after we have a good night cigar tonight."

We rode direct to the stable, and I took Wiggins to my room by the back stairs and bade him help himself to my raiment. He was perfectly tractable, and I was glad to see that he trusted implicitly to my guidance.

I met Miss Octavia in the lower hall. She was just in from the kennels.

"I hope, Arnold, that you have not been without entertainment. By the way, if you should by any chance see Hezekiah you will kindly intimate to her that if she returns that mare she borrowed this morning in reasonably good condition I will overlook her indiscretion in taking it from the stable without permission."

She did not wait for a reply, but continued on to her room, and I went direct to the terrace. Cecilia and Pepperton were just going into the house to look up a book or piece of music which they had been discussing. Cecilia was making herself interesting, as she so well knew how to do, and she seemed in no wise anxious.

"We had forgotten tea," she said. "Aunt Octavia has just ordered it."

"She and Mr. Pepperton may have their tea. I believe the air outside will do you good for a little longer—so if you don't mind, Pepperton, Miss Hollister will resume her promenade alone."

Pep has told me since that he thought me quite mad that afternoon. I bade Cecilia patrol the long terrace slowly. She turned up the collar of the covert coat and obeyed, laughing a little nervously, but asking no questions. The scene could not have been more charmingly set. The great house loomed darkly behind her; beneath lay the garden, over which the dusk was stealing goldenly.

She paused suddenly as I watched from the window, and I stepped out to see what had attracted her attention. There into the garden from its farthest entrance filed the six suitors who had previously come to sit beneath the windows of their stricken lady. Having failed to visit their wrath upon the perfidious Dick they had changed their clothes and returned to Hopefield. If Hezekiah had not expressly commanded me not to become the sixth man, I should have offered myself on the spot and waited only until Cecilia had made the inevitable answer before summoning Wiggins to end the whole affair. Such, however, was not to be the order of events.

The procession, headed by Ormsby, was within a few yards of the terrace. Cecilia, apparently unconscious of their proximity, continued her promenade. In a moment she must recognize them, ask them into the house, give them tea and otherwise destroy my hope of securing her happiness before the day's end.

A chorus of yelps and barks, as of dogs suddenly released, greeted my ear. The oncoming suitors heard it, too, and the line wabbled uncertainly. Then round the house swept mastiffs, hounds, terriers—a collection of prize winners such as few kennels ever boasted—loping gayly in unwonted freedom toward unknown and forbidden pastures.

The vanguard of fox terriers leaped down into the garden, with the rest of the pack at their heels. Happy dogs, to find grown men ready for a gambol! Four of the suitors found one of the proper exits into the road; two leaped the box hedge on the other side without shaking a leaf.

I ran round the house, stumbling through the war guard of the truant canines and passing the kennel master, who had rallied the stable men and was in hot pursuit.

"Somebody turned 'em out—turned 'em out!" he shouted and swept profanely by. The gate of the kennel yard stood open. A familiar figure, running low, paused and then sprinted nimbly along the paddock fence. A white sweater was distinguishable for a moment on a stone wall, then it followed a pair of enchanted heels into oblivion.

Time had been passing swiftly, and the shadows were deepening. I retraced my steps toward the terrace, hearing the cries of pursued and pursuers growing fainter. I had not yet gained a position from which I could see Cecilia, when a man appeared some distance ahead of me, walking guardedly in one of the garden plots. He came uncertainly, pausing to glance about, yet evidently led toward the terrace by a definite purpose. All may be fair in love and war, but I confess to a feeling of pity for John Stewart Dick as I watched him slowly advancing to his fate. He was going boldly now, and I felt a sudden liking for him, nor can I believe that he was other than a manly fellow with sound brains and a good heart.

I reasoned as I marked his approach to the terrace that he had been loitering in the neighborhood, probably watching Cecilia and Pepperton, and when the architect retired he had assumed that the sixth man had spoken. The appearance of his former comrades of the inn had doubtless disturbed him as it had me; then, thanks to the resourceful Hezekiah, they had been routed, and the coast was clear.

I watched him draw nearer to Cecilia as I have watched deer go down to a lake to drink. He would speak now, I was confident of it, and I stole round to the side entrance and sent word to Wiggins to go to the drawing room and wait for me.

Miss Octavia and Pepperton still lingered over their teacups. The row made by the fugitives from her kennels had not, it seemed, penetrated to the library, and Miss Octavia bade me join the talk, which had to do, I remember, with some project for a national hall of fame that had incurred her characteristic displeasure. A hall of immortal rascals in pillories she thought far likelier to please the masses.

In fifteen minutes I saw Cecilia crossing the hall. She stopped where I could see her quite plainly and thrust her hand into the pocket of her coat. Out flashed the silver notebook. She made a swift notation with the pencil that now, I knew, wrote the fate of the sixth man.

I went out and spoke to her and walked beside her to the drawing room door, where Hartley Wiggins was waiting.

Miss Octavia had risen when I returned to the library, and it was time to dress for dinner.

"Just a moment, Miss Hollister. Something of great interest is about to occur." And I made excuses for detaining her for perhaps five minutes, not more.

"You have never yet deceived me, Arnold Ames, and such is my confidence in you that if you tell me that something interesting will soon occur I have no reason to doubt you. It is worth remembering, however, that fowl is not improved by prolonged roasting."

I heard Wiggins laugh in the hall, and Miss Octavia raised her head. Then Cecilia came into the room and walked directly to her aunt.

"Aunt Octavia, here is the little silver notebook you gave me in Paris. I have just written Mr. Wiggins' name in it, and as I have no further use for the book, I return it with my love and thanks."

Without a word Miss Octavia turned to the wall and pressed the button twice.

"William," she said as the butler appeared, "you may serve Oriana '97, and be careful not to freeze it to death; and the hour for dinner is changed to 8. Arnold, you may yourself drive to Gooseberry bungalow for my brother and mate. They dine with me tonight."

* * * * * * *

Hez Kish and I built our bungalow in the apple orchard where on that October afternoon I found her munching a red apple on the stone wall. She is the most scrupulous of housewives and only now took me to task for scattering the hearth with fragments of the notes

"William," she said, "you may serve Oriana '97."

from which this narrative has been written. She has just been reading these last pages with meditative brown eyes and not without occasionally reaching for the pen and retouching some sentence in which, she says, soot from my chimney doctoring days has clogged the ink. Cecilia and Wiggins live at Hopefield across the fields. Miss Octavia insisted on this, for the reason that the sword of Hartley's great-grandfather, found in the chest under the old house, gives him inalienable rights to the premises. Miss Octavia and her brother Bassford are traveling abroad and enjoying those mild adventures to which they are both temperamentally inclined.

My name is joined to Pepperton's on his office door. Pepperton proposed this arrangement, with so many assurances of faith in me that I could not refuse him; but I knew well enough that Miss Octavia had first put it into his head. So while I have called myself a chimney doctor in these pages, I am again an architect.

"You ought to say something more about the Asolando," Hezekiah has just murmured at my shoulder. "Everybody will ask whether we ever went back there."

"Of course we go back there, Hezekiah, every time you come to town and can get hold of me."

"You'd better explain that Aunt Octavia started the tea room and still owns it and makes money out of it, though she rarely goes there, but sends Freda, the maid, to collect the profits. And it won't do any harm to say that when she met you there that day she decided at once that you would be a proper husband for me. Any one who reads your book will want to know that."

Hezekiah is always right. So here endeth the chronicle.

THE END.

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