

A Husband by Proxy

By JACK STEELE

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CHAPTER V.—(Continued)

The "Shadow"

A quarter of ten Garrison entered his room in a train for Branchville. His "shadow" was there in the car. The run required fifty minutes. Hickwood, a very small village, was passed by the cars without a stop. It was hardly two miles from the larger settlement.

The hour was late when Garrison arrived. He and his "shadow" alighted from the train and repaired to a small, one-story hotel near the railway depot, the only place the town afforded. They were presently assigned to adjoining rooms.

Garrison opened his suitcase on the bureau, removed one or two articles, and left the receptacle open, with the cover propped against the mirror. Despite the lateness of the hour he went out, to roam about the village. His fellow traveler watched only to see him out of the house, and then returned to his room.

In the town there was little to be seen. The houses extended far back from the railroad, on considerably elevated hills. There was no street lighting, and the streets were dark. No one seemed stirring in the place, though midnight had not yet struck.

Garrison was out for half an hour. When he returned his suitcase was closed. He thought of nothing of a matter so trifling till he looked inside, and then he underwent a feeling as if it had been rifled. But nothing was gone, so far as he could see. Then he noticed the folding pocket, for its fastening was undone. How well he remembered placing the letter from Ailsa, months ago! A little surprised that he had so utterly forgotten its existence, he slipped his hand inside the place—and found it empty!

Even then he entertained no suspicions, for a moment. The letter, like the photograph, was no longer a valued possession. Yet he wondered where it could have gone. Vaguely uncertain, after all, as to whether he had left it or not, his eye was suddenly caught by the slightest movement in the bureau. The movement was up at the transom, above a door that led to the next adjoining room.

Instantly turning away, to allay any possible suspicion that he might be aware of the fact that someone was spying upon him, Garrison moved the suitcase to a chair, drew from his pocket a folded paper that might have appeared important—although merely a railroad folder—placed it carefully, as if to hide it, under various articles of apparel, set the springs of the vicious trap, and took a turn around the room.

All this business was merely for the benefit of the man whom he knew to be watching from over the top of his door. Garrison, however, appeared to be remembering something left neglected, and hastened from his room, purposely leaving the door more than half-way ajar. Down the hall he strode, to the office, where he looked over the shoulder of John Brown—an obvious alias.

He had hardly been thus engaged for two minutes when the faint, far-off sound of a ringing bell came distinctly to his ears.

"My alarm-clock's gone off," he said to the man at the desk, and he fled up the hall like a sprinter.

A clatter of sounds, as of someone struggling, had come before he reached his room. As he bounded to the window, jerking his suit-case, over his shoulder and as if possessed of evil spirits. No thief was visible. The fellow, with the trap upon his fingers, had already leaped to the ground.

Within a yard of his captured burglar Garrison beheld the suit-case drop, and his man made good his escape.

He thrust his head outside the window, but the darkness was in favor of the thief, who was not to be seen.

Chagrined to think Mr. Brown had contrived to get back to the bureau, and opened it up, by skillfully releasing the springs. Three small patches of finger-skin were left in the bite of his jaws—cards of the visitor left as announcements of his visit.

The room next door was not again occupied that night. The hotel saw no more of Mr. Brown.

CHAPTER VI.

The Coroner

Not in the least reassured, but considerably aroused in all his instincts by these further developments of a night already full of mysterious transactions, Garrison, after a futile watch for his neighbor, once more plunged into a study of the case in which he found himself involved.

Vaguely he remembered to have noticed that the man who had come home to Branchville with him on the train carried no baggage. He had no doubt the man had been upon his feet for some considerable time; but why, and what he wanted, could not be so readily determined. Certain the man had extracted Ailsa's letter from the pocket of the case, yet half convinced that the thief had been searching for the necklace entrusted to his care, Garrison was puzzled.

There seemed to be no possible connection between the two. He could not understand what a thief would take the one would require of the other.

Aside from his money, the gems were the only things he possessed of the slightest value or significance. Half persuaded that the diamonds and pearls afforded the booty for which his visitor had searched, he was once again in doubt as to whether he might find it still among his things, at his room in Forty-fourth Street.

He was fully convinced the man would return no more. Nevertheless, when he turned in at last, the jewels were under the pillow.

Branchville, in the morning, proved an attractive place of residence. Half its male population went to New York as commuters, the housewives bustled

coops, at the rear of the houses, and about their gardens or their chicken-dozen old men gathered slowly at the post-office to resume the task of doing nothing.

Garrison experienced no difficulty in searching out Mrs. Webber, the woman who had supplied certain details concerning the finding of the body of the man, John Hardy, whose death had occurred here the previous week.

The house at the porch of which the body had been discovered, was empty. Mrs. Webber went with Garrison to the place, showed him exactly where the body had reclined, and left him alone at the scene.

He looked the details over carefully. The porch was low and roofed; its eaves projected a foot. If, as Garrison fancied, the stricken man might have come here in weakness, to lean against the post, and had then gone down, perhaps leaving heel-marks in the earth, all signs of any such action had been obliterated, despite the fact that no rains had fallen since the date of the man's demise.

Garrison scrutinized the ground closely. A piece of broken crockery, a cork, the top of a can, an old cigar, and some bits of glass and wire lay beside the baseboard—the usual signs of neglect.

The one man-made article in all that litter that attracted Garrison's attention was the old cigar. He took it up for a more minute examination.

It had never been lighted. It was broken, as if someone had stepped upon the larger end; but the label, a bright red band of paper, was still upon the wrapper had somewhat spread; but the wrapper had been bitten off, half an inch up on the taper.

Aware that the weed might have been thrown down by anyone save Hardy, Garrison nevertheless placed it in an envelope and tucked it away in his pocket.

A visit to the local coroner, presenting itself as the next most natural step, he proceeded at once to his office.

As a dealer in real estate, a notary public, and an official in several directions, the coroner was a busy man. He said so himself.

Garrison introduced himself candidly as a New York detective, duly licensed, at present representing a State insurance company, and stated the nature of his business.

"All right," said the coroner, inclining once to be friendly. "My name is Pike. What'd you want to know? Sit down and take it easy."

"As much as I can learn about the case," said Garrison, proffering his chair.

"For instance, what did you find on the body?"

"Nothing—of any importance—a bunch of keys, a fountain-pen, and just some useless trash—I believe four dollars and nineteen cents."

"Anything else?"

"Oh, some scraps of paper and a picture post-card."

"Any cigars?" asked Garrison.

"Yep—three, with labels on 'em—all but one, I mean." He had taken one label for his son's collection.

"What did you do with the stuff?"

"Locked it up, waiting orders from the court," replied Mr. Pike. "You bet, I know my business."

Garrison was pursuing a point. He inquired: "Do you smoke?"

"No, I don't; and if I did, I wouldn't touch one of 'em," said the coroner.

"And don't you forget it."

"Did anyone help you to carry off the body—anyone who might have thrown a cigar away, unlighted?"

"No, sarge. When Billy Ford and Tom Harris got a cigar it never gets away," said Mr. Pike.

"Did you find out where the dead man came from and what he was doing in the village?"

"He was stopping down to Hickwood with Mrs. Wilson," answered Pike. "His friend there was Charlie Scott, who's making a flying-machine that's enough to make anybody lumpy. I've told him he can't borrow no money from me on no such contraption, and so has Billy Dodd."

Garrison mentally noted down the fact that Scott was in need of money.

"What can you tell me of the man's appearance?" he added, after a moment of silence.

"Did his face present any signs of agony?"

"Nope. Just looked dead," said the coroner.

"Were there any signs upon him of any nature?"

"Grass stain on his knee—that's about all."

"About all?" Garrison echoed. "Was there anything else—any scratches or bruises on his hands?"

"No—nary a scratch. He had real fine hands," said the coroner. "But they did have a little dirt on 'em, right on three of the knuckles—the left hand and on one on the right—the kind of dirt you can't rub off."

"Did it look as if he'd tried to rub it off?"

"Looked as if he'd washed it a little and it wouldn't come."

"Just common black dirt?"

"Yes, kind of grimy—the kind that gets in a man's shoes."

Garrison reflected that a sign of this nature might and might not prove important. Everything depended on further developments. One deduction was presented to his mind—the man had doubtless observed that his hands were soiled and had washed them in the dark, since anyone with the "fine" hands described by the coroner would be almost certain to keep them immaculate; but, might, in the absence of a light, wash them half clean only.

He was not disposed to attach a very great importance to the matter, however, and only paused for a moment to recall a number of various "dirts" that resist an effort to remove them—printer's ink, acid stains, axle grease, and greasy soot.

He shifted his line of questions abruptly.

"What do you discover about the dead man's relatives? The nephew who came to claim the body?"

"Never saw him," said the coroner.

"I couldn't hang around the corpse all day. I'm the busiest man in Branchville, and I had to go down to New York the day he came."

"Did you take possession of any property that deceased might have had at his room in Hickwood?"

"Sure," said Pike. "Half a dozen collars, and some socks, a few old letters, and a box almost full of cigars."

"If these things are here in your office," said Garrison, rising, "I should like to look them over."

"You bet, I can put my hand on anything in my business in a minute," boasted Mr. Pike. He rose and crossed the room to a desk with a large, deep drawer.

The dead man's possessions were few, indeed. The three cigars which his pocket had disgorged were lying near a little pile of money. Garrison noted at once that the labels on the broken counterparts of the cigars of the two were identical, and he glanced at the box beneath his hand. The cigars inside were all precisely like the others. Five only had ever been removed, of which four were accounted for already. The other had doubtless been smoked.

On the even row of dark-brown weeks lay a card, on which, written in pencil, were the words:

A Birthday Greeting—With Love

Garrison let fall the lid and glanced with fading interest at the few insignificant papers and other trifles which the drawer contained. He had practically made up his mind that John Hardy had died, as the coroner had found, of heart disease, or apoplexy, even in the act of lighting up the man further, made up his mind to visit Charles Scott and Mrs. Wilson, in Hickwood, and was presently out upon the road.

CHAPTER VII.

A Startling Discovery

Garrison walked along the road to Hickwood out of state of being in the open, and he was the better to think, however, his thoughts wandered tranquilly back to New York and the mystery about the girl masquerading to be his wife.

His little daughter, as soon as she could toddle almost, spent her playtime with him. When she was a little older she constituted herself his "washer," cleaning the instruments and apparatus after he had done with it. Quickly and dextrously she handled her toys, and she handled them reverently.

When she grew older she began to learn the various places in the laboratory of every instrument and every bottle, and something of their meaning.

Poverty is usually recognized as pinching a woman harder than a man. It needed all the girl scientist's pluck and enthusiasm to sustain her during her early student days in Paris. The pale-faced, high-browed girl who was destined to divide with her husband and M. Becquerel the Nobel Science award of \$20,000 and who was appointed to be the first woman to be appointed to a chair at the Paris Sorbonne, was so poor when she first arrived in the city that she had to go to study at a municipal working class technical school. It was in the laboratory here that her wonderful capabilities attracted the attention of Professor Curie, whom she subsequently married.

Curie, who was frugally in a quiet house in Paris, screened from the outer world by a high wall. When she is not in her laboratory or indulging in her favorite recreation, cycling, she is to be found teaching her little daughter, and on the whole, she is passionately fond of her mother. She is as devoted to her home as though she had never heard of pitch-blende.

Other women who might be incited to envy her are disarmed by her modesty. To an admirer belabors her with compliments upon her achievements and shrugs her shoulders as though she had done little to make a fuss about.

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Garrison. "Some of us never enjoy such good fortune."

"The world don't know how great I am," declared the inventor, instantly off, on just the minute that insurance company gives me the money, I'll be ready to startle the skies! I'll blot out the stars for 'em! I'll show New York! I know what I'm doing! All these fool balloonists, with their big silk floating cigars! Dearly cigars is what they are—dearly! You wait!

Garrison was staring at him fixedly, fascinated by a new idea which had crept upon his mind, and, startling abruptly. His one idea was to get away for a vital two minutes by himself.

"Well, perhaps I'll try to get around again," he said. "I can see you're very busy, and I mustn't keep you longer from your work. Good luck and good-day."

(To be Continued)

GREATEST WOMAN IN ALL THE WORLD—MME. CURIE

A MIDDLE-AGED woman, fairly tall, and with a pale face, her features regular, clear-cut, and of the English type. Her lips thin and slightly harsh-looking, suggesting privation. Her forehead remarkably high and crowned with waves of golden hair. Her eyes adamantine with enthusiasm.

Such is Mme. Curie, woman in the world, and who, in conjunction with another French scientist has made such wonderful discoveries regarding the element polonium, which is 5,000 rarer than radium. Of course, it was Mme. Curie who, with her husband, discovered radium.

She is one of those very rare women with a passion for science. Most women lack the nicety of observation, the attention to minute detail, the patience, and the physical strength, required for laboratory work. However, it is different. Her love of research is an inheritance.

Her nursery was a laboratory. Forty years ago (Mme. Curie is now in her forty-fifth year) she gave up her dolls to her father, and spent her playtime with physics at a college in Warsaw. Like most professors, he contrived to spend a considerable portion of his income on scientific experiments.

His little daughter, as soon as she could toddle almost, spent her playtime with him. When she was a little older she constituted herself his "washer," cleaning the instruments and apparatus after he had done with it. Quickly and dextrously she handled her toys, and she handled them reverently.

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