

Tucholsky Wagner Zola Scott  
Turgenev Wallace Fonatne Sydon Freud Schlegel  
Twain Walther von der Vogelweide Fouqué Friedrich II. von Preußen  
Weber Freiligrath Frey  
Fechner Fichte Weiße Rose von Fallersleben Kant Ernst Richthofen Frommel  
Engels Fielding Hölderlin Eichendorff Tacitus Dumas  
Fehrs Faber Flaubert Eliasberg Eliot Zweig Ebner Eschenbach  
Feuerbach Maximilian I. von Habsburg Fock Ewald Vergil  
Goethe Elisabeth von Österreich London  
Mendelssohn Balzac Shakespeare Rathenau Dostojewski Ganghofer  
Trackl Stevenson Lichtenberg Doyle Gjellerup  
Mommsen Thoma Tolstoi Lenz Hambruch Droste-Hülshoff  
Dach Thoma von Arnim Hägele Hanrieder Hauptmann Humboldt  
Karrillon Reuter Verne Rousseau Hagen Hauff Baudelaire Gautier  
Garschin Defoe Hebbel Hegel Kussmaul Herder  
Damaschke Descartes Schopenhauer George  
Wolfram von Eschenbach Darwin Dickens Grimm Jerome Rilke Bebel Proust  
Bronner Campe Horváth Aristoteles Voltaire Federer Herodot  
Bismarck Vigny Gengenbach Barlach Heine Grillparzer Georgy  
Storm Casanova Lessing Tersteegen Gilm Gryphius  
Chamberlain Langbein Schiller Iffland Sokrates  
Brentano Claudius Schilling Kralik Katharina II. von Rußland Bellamy Raabe Gibbon Tschchow  
Gerstäcker Vulpus  
Löns Hesse Hoffmann Gogol Wilde Gleim  
Luther Heym Hofmannsthal Klee Hölty Morgenstern Goedicke  
Roth Heyse Klopstock Puschkin Homer Kleist  
Luxemburg La Roche Horaz Mörike Musil  
Machiavelli Kierkegaard Kraft Kraus  
Navarra Aurel Musset Lamprecht Kind Kirchhoff Hugo Moltke  
Nestroy Marie de France Laotse Ipsen Liebknecht  
Nietzsche Nansen Lassalle Gorki Klett Leibniz Ringelntz  
von Ossietzky Marx vom Stein Lawrence Irving  
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# **A Husband by Proxy**

Jack Steele

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# A Husband by Proxy

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROPOSITION

With the hum of New York above, below, and all about him, stirring his pulses and prodding his mental activities, Jerold Garrison, expert criminologist, stood at the window of his recently opened office, looking out upon the roofs and streets of the city with a new sense of pride and power in his being.

New York at last!

He was here — unknown and alone, it was true — but charged with an energy that he promised Manhattan should feel.

He was almost penniless, with his office rent, his licenses, and other expenses paid, but he shook his fist at the city, in sheer good nature and confidence in his strength, despite the fact he had waited a week for expected employment, and nothing at present loomed upon the horizon.

His past, in a small Ohio town, was behind him. He blotted it out without regret — or so at least he said to himself — even as to all the gilded hopes which had once seemed his all upon earth. If his heart was not whole, no New York eye should see its wounds — and the healing process had begun.

He was part of the vast machine about him, the mighty brain, as it were, of the great American nation.

He paced the length of his room, and glanced at the door. The half-painted sign on the frosted glass was legible, reversed, as the artist had left it:

### **JEROLD — — — — CRIMINOLOGIST.**

He had halted the painter himself on the name, as the lettering appeared too fanciful — not sufficiently plain or bold.

While he stood there a shadow fell upon the glass. Someone was standing outside, in the hall. As if undecided, the owner of the shadow oscillated for a moment—and disappeared. Garrison, tempted to open the door and gratify a natural curiosity, remained beside his desk. Mechanically his hand, which lay upon a book entitled "A Treatise on Poisons," closed the volume.

He was still watching the door. The shadow returned, the knob was revolved, and there, in the oaken frame, stood a tall young woman of extraordinary beauty, richly though quietly dressed, and swiftly changing color with excitement.

Pale in one second, crimson in the next, and evidently concentrating all her power on an effort to be calm, she presented a strangely appealing and enchanting figure to the man across the room. Bravery was blazing in her glorious brown eyes, and firmness came upon her manner as she stepped inside, closed the door, and silently confronted the detective.

The man she was studying was a fine-looking, clean-cut fellow, gray-eyed, smooth-shaven, with thick brown hair, and with a gentleman-athlete air that made him distinctly attractive. The fearless, honest gaze of his eyes completed a personal charm that was undeniable in his entity.

It seemed rather long that the two thus stood there, face to face. Garrison candidly admiring in his gaze, his visitor studious and slightly uncertain.

She was the first to speak.

"Are you Mr. Jerold?"

"Jerold Garrison," the detective answered. "My sign is unfinished. May I offer you a chair?"

His caller sat down beside the desk. She continued to study his face frankly, with a half-shy, half-defiant scrutiny, as if she banished a natural diffidence under pressure of necessity.

She spoke again, abruptly.

"I wish to procure peculiar services. Are you a very well-known detective?"

"I have never called myself a detective," said Garrison. "I'm trying to occupy a higher sphere of usefulness. I left college a year ago, and last week opened my office here and became a New Yorker."

He might, in all modesty, have exhibited a scrap-book filled with accounts of his achievements, with countless references to his work as a "scientific criminologist" of rare mental attainments. Of his attainments as a gentleman there was no need of reference. They proclaimed themselves in his bearing.

His visitor laid a glove and a scrap of paper on the desk.

"It isn't so much detective services I require," she said; "but of course you are widely acquainted in New York—I mean with young men particularly?"

"No," he replied, "I know almost none. But I know the city fairly well, if that will answer your purpose."

"I thought, of course—I hoped you might know some honorable— — You see, I have come on rather extraordinary business," she said, faltering a little helplessly. "Let me ask you first—is the confidence of a possible client quite sacred with a man in this profession?"

"Absolutely sacred!" he assured her. "Whether you engage my services or not, your utterances here will be treated as confidential and as inviolate as if spoken to a lawyer, a doctor, or a clergyman."

"Thank you," she murmured. "I have been hunting around— —"

She left the sentence incomplete.

"And you found my name quite by accident," he supplied, indicating the scrap of paper. "I cannot help observing that you have been to other offices first. You have tramped all the way down Broadway from Forty-second Street, for the red ink that someone spilled at the Forty-first Street crossing is still on your shoe, together with just a film of dust."

She withdrew her shoe beneath the edge of her skirt, although he had never apparently glanced in that direction.

"Yes," she admitted, "I have been to others—and they wouldn't do. I came in here because of the name—Jerold. I am sorry you are not better acquainted—for my business is important."

"Perhaps if I knew the nature of your needs I might be able to advise you," said Garrison. "I hope to be more widely acquainted soon."

She cast him one look, full of things inscrutable, and lowered her lashes in silence. She was evidently striving to overcome some indecision.

Garrison looked at her steadily. He thought he had never in his life beheld a woman so beautiful. Some wild, unruly hope that she might become his client, perhaps even a friend, was flaring in his mind.

The color came and went in her cheeks, adding fresh loveliness at every change. She glanced at her list of names, from which a number had been scratched.

"Well," she said presently, "I think perhaps you might still be able to attend to my requirements."

He waited to hear her continue, but she needed encouragement.

"I shall be glad to try," he assured her.

She was silent again—and blushing. She looked up somewhat defiantly.

"I wish you to procure me a husband."

Garrison stared. He was certain he had heard incorrectly.

"I do not mean an actual husband," she explained. "I simply mean some honorable young man who will assume the rôle for a time, as a business proposition, for a fee to be paid as I would pay for anything else.

"I would require that he understand the affair to be strictly commercial, and that when I wish the arrangement to terminate he will disappear from the scene and from my acquaintance at once and absolutely.

"All I ask of you is to supply me such a person. I will pay you whatever fee you may demand—in reason."

Garrison looked at her as fixedly as she was looking at him.

Her recital of her needs had brought to the surface a phase of desperation in her bearing that wrought upon him potently, he knew not why.

"I think I understand your requirements, as far as one can in the circumstances," he answered. "I hardly believe I have the ability to engage such a person as you need for such a mission. I informed you at the start that my acquaintance with New York men is exceedingly narrow. I cannot think of anyone I could honestly recommend."

"But don't you know any honorable young gentleman—like some college man, perhaps—here in New York, looking for employment; someone who might be glad to earn, say, five hundred dollars?" she insisted. "Surely if you only know a few, there must be one among them."

Garrison sat back in his chair and took hold of his smooth-shaved lip with his thumb and finger. He reviewed his few New York experiences rapidly.

"No," he repeated. "I know of no such man. I am sorry."

His visitor looked at him with a new, flashing light in her eyes.

"Not one?" she said, significantly. "Not one young *college* man?"

He was unsuspecting of her meaning.

"Not one."

For a moment she fingered her glove where it lay upon the desk. Then a look of more pronounced determination and courage came upon her face as she raised her eyes once more to Garrison's.

She said:

"Are you married?"

A flush came at once upon Garrison's face—and memories and heartaches possessed him for a poignant moment. He mastered himself almost instantly.

"No," he said with some emotion, "I am not."

"Then," she said, "couldn't you undertake the task yourself?"

Garrison leaned forward on the table. Lightning from an azure sky could have been no more astonishing or unexpected.

"Do you mean — will I play this rôle — as your husband?" he said slowly.

"Is that what you are asking?"

"Yes," she answered unflinchingly. "Why not? You need the money; I need the services. You understand exactly what it is I require. It is business, and you are a business man."

"But I have no wish to be a married man, or even to masquerade as one," he told her bluntly.

"You have quite as much wish to be one as I have to be a married woman," she answered. "We would understand each other thoroughly from the start. As to masquerading, if you have no acquaintances, then who would be the wiser?"

He acknowledged the logic of her argument; nevertheless, the thing seemed utterly preposterous. He rose and walked the length of his office, and stood looking out of the window. Then he returned and resumed his seat. He was strangely moved by her beauty and some unexplained helplessness of her plight, vouchsafed to his senses, yet he recognized a certain need for caution.

"What should I be expected to do?" he inquired.

His visitor, in the mental agitation which had preceded this interview, had taken little if any time to think of the details likely to attend an alliance such as she had just proposed. She could only think in generalities.

"Why — there will be very little for you to do, except to permit yourself to be considered my lawful husband, temporarily," she replied after a moment of hesitation, with a hot flush mounting to her cheek.

"And to whom would I play?" he queried. "Should I be obliged, in this capacity, to meet your relatives and friends?"

"Certainly—a few," said his visitor. "But I have almost no relatives in the world. I have no father, mother, brothers, or sisters. There will be, at most, a few distant relatives and possibly my lawyer."

Garrison made no response. He was trying to think what such a game would mean—and what it might involve.

His visitor presently added:

"Do you consent—for five hundred dollars?"

"I don't know," answered the man. Again he paced the room. When he halted before his client he looked at her sternly.

"You haven't told me your name," he said.

She gave him her card, on which appeared nothing more than just merely the name "Mrs. Jerold Fairfax," with an address in an uptown West Side street.

Garrison glanced at it briefly.

"This is something you have provided purposely to fit your requirements," he said. "Am I not supposed to know you by any other name?"

"If you accept the—the employment," she answered, once more blushing crimson, "you may be obliged at times to call me Dorothy. My maiden name was Dorothy Booth."

Garrison merely said: "Oh!"

They were silent for a moment. The man was pondering the possibilities. His visitor was evidently anxious.

"I suppose I can find someone else if you refuse the employment," she said. "But you will understand that my search is one of great difficulty. The person I employ must be loyal, a gentleman, courageous, resourceful, and very little known. You can see yourself that you are particularly adapted for the work."

"Thank you," said Garrison, who was aware that no particular flattery was intended. He added: "I hardly suppose it could do me any harm."

Mrs. Fairfax accepted this ungallant observation calmly. She recognized the fact that his side of the question had its aspects.

She waited for Garrison to speak again.

A knock at the door startled them both. A postman entered, dropped two letters on the desk, and departed down the hall.

Garrison took up the letters. One was a circular of his own, addressed to a lawyer over a month before, and now returned undelivered and marked "Not found," though three or four different addresses had been supplied in its peregrinations.

The second letter was addressed to himself in typewritten form. He was too engrossed to tear it open, and laid them both upon the table.

"If I took this up," he presently resumed, "I should be obliged to know something more about it. For instance, when were we supposed to have been married?"

"On the 10th of last month," she answered promptly.

"Oh!" said he. "And, in case of necessity, how should we prove it?"

"By my wedding certificate," she told him calmly.

His astonishment increased.

"Then you were actually married, over a month ago?"

"I have the certificate. Isn't that sufficient?" she replied evasively.

"Well—I suppose it is—for this sort of an arrangement," he agreed. "Of course some man's name must appear in the document. I should be obliged, I presume, to adopt his name as part of the arrangement?"

"Certainly," she said. "I told you I came into your office because your name is Jerold."

"Exactly," he mused. "The name I'd assume is Jerold Fairfax?"

She nodded, watching him keenly.

"It's a good enough name," said Garrison.

He paced up and down the floor in silence a number of times. Mrs. Fairfax watched him in apparent calm.

"This is a great temptation," he admitted. "I should like to earn the fee you have mentioned, Miss Booth—Mrs. Fairfax, but— —"

He halted.

"Well?"

"I don't exactly like the look of it, to be frank," he confessed. "I don't know you, and you don't know me. I am not informed whether you are really married or not. If you are, and the man— — You have no desire to enlighten me on these matters. Can you tell me why you wish to pretend that I am your husband?"

"I do not wish to discuss that aspect of the arrangement at present," she said. "It is purely a business proposition that should last no more than a month or two at most, and then terminate forever. I would prefer to have you remain out of town as much as possible."

"A great many haphazard deductions present themselves to my mind," he said, "but all are doubtless inaccurate. I have no morbid curiosity concerning your affairs, but this thing would involve me almost as much as yourself, by its very nature."

His brows were knitted in indecision.

There was silence again between them. His visitor presently said:

"If I could offer you more than the five hundred dollars, I would gladly do so."

"Oh, the fee is large enough, for up to date I have had no employment or even a prospect of work," said Garrison. "I hope you will not be offended when I say that I have recently become a cautious man."

"I know how strange it appears for me to come here with this extraordinary request," agreed Mrs. Fairfax. "I hardly know how I have done so. But there was no one to help me. I hope you will not consider the matter for another moment if you feel that either of us cannot trust the other. In a way, I am placing my honor in your keeping far more than you are placing yourself in charge of mine."

Garrison looked at her steadily, and something akin to sympathy—something that burned like wine of romance in his blood—with zest of adventure and a surge of generosity toward this un-

known girl—tingled in all his being. Something in her helplessness appealed to his innate chivalry.

Calmly, however, he took a new estimate of her character, notwithstanding the fact that his first, most reliable impression had been entirely in her favor.

"Well," he said, after a moment, "it's a blind game for me, but I think I'll accept your offer. When do you wish me to begin my services?"

"I should like to notify my lawyer as soon as possible," answered Mrs. Fairfax, frankly relieved by his decision. "He may regard the fact that he was not sooner notified as a little peculiar."

"Practically you wish me to assume my rôle at once," commented Garrison. "What is your lawyer's name?"

"Mr. Stephen Trowbridge."

Garrison took up that much-addressed letter, returned by the post, and passed it across the table. The one fairly legible line on its surface read:

**STEPHEN TROWBRIDGE, ESQ.**

"I think that must be the same individual," he said. "I sent out announcements of my business and presence here to nearly every lawyer in the State. This envelope has been readdressed, as you observe, but it has never reached its destination. Is that your man?"

Mrs. Fairfax examined the missive.

"Yes," she said, "I think so. Do you wish his present address?"

"If you please," answered Garrison. "I shall take the liberty of steaming this open and removing its contents, after which I will place an antedated letter or notification of the—our marriage—written by yourself—in the envelope, redirect it, and send it along. It will finally land in the hands of your lawyer with its tardiness very naturally explained."

"You mean the notification will appear as if misdirected originally," said Dorothy. "An excellent idea."

"Perhaps you will compose the note at once," said Garrison, pushing paper, pen, and ink across the desk. "You may leave the rest, with the address, to me."

His visitor hesitated for a moment, as if her decision wavered in this vital moment of plunging into unknown fates, but she took up the pen and wrote the note and address with commendable brevity.

Garrison was walking up and down the office.

"The next step — " he started to say, but his visitor interrupted.

"Isn't this the only step necessary to take until something arises making others expedient?"

"There is one slight thing remaining," he answered, taking up her card.

"You are in a private residence?"

"Yes. The caretaker, a woman, is always there."

"Have you acquainted her with the fact of your marriage?"

"Certainly. She is an English servant. She asks no questions. But I told her my husband is away from town and will be absent almost constantly for the next two or three months."

Garrison slightly elevated his brows, in acknowledgment of the thoroughness of her arrangements.

"I have never attempted much acting—a little at private theatricals," he told her; "but of course we shall both be obliged to play this little domestic comedy with some degree of art."

She seemed prepared for that also, despite the sudden crimson of her cheeks.

"Certainly."

"One more detail," he added. "You have probably found it necessary to withhold certain facts from my knowledge. I trust I shall not be led into awkward blunders. I shall do my best, and for the rest — I

beg of you to conduct the affair according to your own requirements and judgment."

The slightly veiled smile in his eyes did not escape her observation. Nevertheless, she accepted his proposal quite as a matter of course.

"Thank you. I am glad you relieved me of the necessity of making some such suggestion. I think that is all—for the present." She stood up, and, fingering her glove, glanced down at the table for a moment. "May I pay, say, two hundred dollars now, as a retainer?"

"I shall be gratified if you will," he answered.

In silence she counted out the money, which she took from a purse in a bag. The bills lay there in a heap.

"When you wish any more, will you please let me know?" she said. "And when I require your services I will wire. Perhaps I'd better take both this office and your house address."

He wrote them both on a card and placed it in her hand.

"Thank you," she murmured. She closed her purse, hesitated a moment, then raised her eyes to his. Quite coldly she added: "Good-afternoon."

"Good-day," answered Garrison.

He opened the door, bowed to her slightly as she passed—then faced about and stared at the money that lay upon his desk.

## CHAPTER II

### A SECOND EMPLOYMENT

For a moment, when he found himself alone, Garrison stood absolutely motionless beside the door. Slowly he came to the desk again, and slowly he assembled the bills. He rolled them in a neat, tight wad, and held them in his hand.

Word for word and look for look he reviewed the recent dialogue, shaking his head at the end.

He had never been so puzzled in his life.

The situation, his visitor—all of it baffled him utterly. Had not the money remained in his grasp he might have believed he was dreaming.

"She was frightened, and yet she had a most remarkable amount of nerve," he reflected. "She might be an heiress, an actress, or a princess. She may be actually married—and then again she may not; probably not, since two husbands on the scene would be embarrassing."

"She may be playing at any sort of a game, financial, political, or domestic—therefore dangerous, safe, or commonplace, full of intrigue, or a mystery, or the silliest caprice.

"She—oh, Lord—I don't know! She is beautiful—that much is certain. She seems to be honest. Those deep, brown eyes go with innocence—and also with scheming; in which respect they precisely resemble blue eyes, and gray, and all the other feminine colors. And yet she seemed, well, helpless, worried—almost desperate. She must be desperate and helpless."

Again, in fancy, he was looking in her face, and something was stirring in his blood. That was all he really knew. She had stirred him—and he was glad of the meeting—glad he had entered her employment.

He placed the roll of money in his pocket, then looked across his desk at the clean, white letter which the postman had recently delivered.

He took it up, paused again to wonder at the meaning of what had occurred, then tore the envelope and drew forth the contents.

He had barely spread the letter open when a knock on the door startled every thought in his brain.

His first conclusion was that Mrs. Fairfax had returned to repudiate her bargain and ask the surrender of her money. With a smile for any fate, he crossed the room and opened the door.

In the hallway stood a man—a little, sharp-faced, small-eyed, thin-nosed person, with a very white complexion, and a large, smooth-shaved mouth, open as if in a smile that never ceased.

"Garrison?" he said sharply. "Wicks—I'm Wicks."

"Wicks?" said Garrison. "Come in."

Mr. Wicks stepped in with a snap-like alacrity. "Read your letter," he said—"read your letter."

Obediently Garrison perused the missive in hand, typed on the steel-plate stationery of the New York Immutable Life Insurance Company:

**"DEAR SIR:**

"At the recommendation of our counsel, Mr. Sperry Lochlan, who is still abroad, we desire to secure your services in a professional capacity. Our Mr. Wicks will call upon you this afternoon to explain the nature of the employment and conclude the essential arrangements.

"Respectfully yours,  
"JOHN STEFFAS,  
"Dep't of Special Service."