

# MURDER MASQUERADE

BY INEZ HAYNES IRWIN

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TUESDAY—Continued

—10—

"No, Mrs. Avery," Bessie said stonily, "it doesn't surprise me."

"Bessie," I suggested, "would you like to go away for a week or two? I think a change would do you good."

Bessie's steely mask flared with panic. "Oh no, Mrs. Avery!" she remonstrated in a frightened voice. "Oh no! I don't want to go away from here. I can't go away from here. I can't—I can't!"

"You don't have to go, Bessie," I soothed, "if you don't want to go. But somehow, I thought you'd like a change."

Again panic flared in Bessie. "But I'm going to ask Doctor Geary to call today," I promised hastily. "He'll give you something that will make you sleep."

"I'd like that, Mrs. Avery," Bessie declared almost inaudibly.

I had scarcely finished telephoning the Geary house when the police car curved into the drive.

"Take me where we can talk alone, Mary," Patrick said. I led him to the piazza which looked toward the Spinney. "By God, Mary, I'm in a jam!" Patrick said as he seated himself in the broad Gloucester hammock. "I might have to arrest Margaret Fairweather. And anyway, I've got to put a watch on her house."

"Oh no!" burst from me involuntarily.

"That's the way I feel about it!" Patrick commented grimly.

"It would kill Flora if Margaret was arrested."

"That's the way I feel about it," Patrick repeated, more grimly still.

"Queer I never thought of her when Tony told me about the tall woman in dark clothes. You thought of her at once, didn't you?"

At first I did not reply. Then I said, "How did you know that?"

"Because later, when I thought of it myself, I could remember your face. I realized that you'd thought of it. Not that either of us said anything."

He paused for a moment. "Perhaps I could fix it to let Margaret stay in her own home for a while. I could detail a car to saunter up and down the cliff—without raising suspicion, I guess."

"But you haven't any real evidence on Margaret," I remonstrated.

"It is a little negative, I'll admit. But here you are. No woman left the masquerade until long after midnight—with the exception of Molly Eames—Molly Treadway I mean. Molly left with Walter. No other woman came over to the Head that night. There was no other woman at home that night on the Head—except Flora and Margaret Fairweather and Hannah. One of my men called with his wife on Hannah last night. He called, of course, because I sent him, but Hannah doesn't know that. Naturally they talked about nothing but the murder. He established that Hannah spent the whole evening with Flora. Margaret slept, as she frequently does, downstairs on the porch. Hannah said that Margaret went to bed early because she was so tired. Hannah sleeps on the porch outside Flora's chamber. Now as soon as Hannah was asleep why couldn't Margaret have slipped out quietly from the piazza to meet Ace Blaikie in the Spinney?"

"But what would she want to meet Ace for?" I queried mechanically.

Patrick did not answer me. But he looked at me. I made no comment. But I looked at him. Un-said things began to whirl in the air about us. And then I heard an automobile crunching up the drive.

"Miss Fairweather is here, Mrs. Avery," Sarah Darbe announced from the doorway. "She says she would like to see you and Mr. O'Brien."

My thoughts began to spin. I made up my mind to say nothing about Hannah's nap.

When Margaret Fairweather appeared in the doorway, my thoughts curiously enough, flew at once to Bessie. It was the common devastation in their faces which linked them together in my mind. Bessie's face had turned the strange gray which dark skins assume under torment either physical or mental. Margaret's flesh had gone waxy. Hers might have been a dead face—if it had not been for the burning intensity of the harrowed eyes.

"I went over to the police station to see you, Patrick," she announced in her strange, dead voice, "but they told me that you were here."

Patrick drew a long sigh. By its depth, I gauged the extent of his relief. "Is there something I can do for you, Margaret?"

Margaret looked at him hard. "I must talk to someone, she said. 'I have a strange story to tell you. You may find it on the surface unbelievable. I can only say that I am telling you the exact truth.'"

Patrick remained silent.

"About a week ago, Ace Blaikie called at the house and asked me if I would lend him some money. For many reasons, I did not want to lend Ace any money. I did not like him in the first place. In fact— Suddenly her dead eyes blazed. "In fact—I hated him. I did not trust him either. When he told me how much he wanted to borrow, I was appalled."

Patrick said, "How much was it?"

"Ten thousand dollars," Margaret answered.

Patrick whistled. I said nothing. I could not speak.

"What did Ace want that ten thousand dollars for?" Patrick asked.

"I don't know," Margaret answered. "Perhaps I could guess, but I'd rather not." She looked pleadingly at Patrick.

"You're right, Margaret!" Patrick approved. "Let's confine ourselves to the facts. Did you lend him this money?"

"Yes—but not at once. I told him I would have to think it over. I knew that I would have to take that ten thousand out of my principal."

"He called more than once?" Patrick interrupted.

"Yes, four times. I have the days in my diary. Ace stipulated—requested I mean," she corrected herself with the careful honesty typical of her, "that I give him a certified check. It all took time, but he kept hurrying me. He wanted the money, I felt, for something special."

"When was the last time he had been in your house before that?" Patrick asked.

"Ace Blaikie had not been in my house for twenty-five years," Margaret replied.

"Did you give him the money?" Patrick asked.

"Yes."

"When?"

"The night of the masquerade."

"Where?"

"In Mary's Spinney."

Patrick sighed again. "About what time was it?" he asked.

"A little after ten thirty."

"How were you dressed?"

"I wore a black dress, a black scarf over my head, a big black lace shawl of my mother's."

"How did you go to the Spinney?"

"I walked up the road toward the Park, turned off at Mary's path, walked past the Little House and met Ace—" She paused bleakly.

Patrick waited.

"At the exact spot where they found his body," Margaret concluded.

A pause, pregnant with awful possibilities, whirled between us three.

"Did your interview take long?" Patrick asked gently.

"No, it took scarcely a moment."

"Could you reproduce it for me?"

"Easily," I said. "Here is the check, Ace." He said, "Thank you! Here's my note for it!" I handed him the check and he handed me the note. I have it with me. Would you like to see it?"

"Yes—thank you, Margaret, for thinking of that."

Margaret took a folded piece of paper from her hand-bag and handed it to Patrick. He examined it on both sides, held it up to the light. "Will you trust this with me for a while?"

"Certainly, Patrick," Margaret replied.

"By the way, Margaret, who'd you make it out to? Oh yes, you'd have to make it out to Ace."

"Yes."

Patrick whistled. "That complicates things. Perhaps there's somebody boob enough to think he could murder Ace and then forge Ace's endorsement on the check. Has the check been cashed, Margaret?"

"No. The day I heard of Ace's death, I went over to the bank to stop payment. They said I couldn't do that without a court order. They told me it hadn't been cashed."

"Well, we'll watch that point anyhow," Patrick assured her. "Was that all you said?" Patrick went on.

"No. I said one other thing and it was the only other thing I did say. I said, 'Ace Blaikie, I hope you die the death you deserve!'"

Patrick stroked the back of his head, then he clasped his hands there and let his head rest against them. "What did Ace do with the check?"

"He took off his helmet and put the check inside—in the sweat-band."

"Was there anything else?"

"Nothing—so far as Ace was concerned."

"Did you see Tony Torriano go off into the bushes?"

"No."

"You say, 'Nothing—as far as Ace was concerned.'" Patrick's voice held an interrogative note.

"As I went back over the path, I thought I heard a stir in the bushes."

"Not loud then?"

"No, a mere stir! A cat might have made it."

"You saw nothing?"

"Nothing. In fact I did not quite realize that I had heard it until I got home. Then I heard it in memory. It may have been only a cat—but I heard something stir."

Patrick's Irish gray eyes had turned brilliant. He still rested his head against his clasped hands. For a moment he did not speak, but his eyes never left Margaret. She did not speak either.

"Margaret," Patrick began, "you and I are old friends and we've known each other for forty years and perhaps longer. You know that I've always been fond of you and Flora, that I respect you and that I trust you. But I'm the police chief here in this town. And it doesn't make any difference what I think, or believe. My business is to prove. I believe your story of course. But Margaret, I must ask you some questions. Maybe you won't find them pleasant. I've got to do it though."

"Ask any questions you want, Patrick," Margaret said.

"Well, if I were a jury, the first thing I'd want to know would be why you were willing to lend Ace Blaikie so much money, especially when you hated him."

"I did it to prolong my sister's life. I made up my mind that Ace should not enter our house again. The last time he came, he said that if I couldn't lend him the money, perhaps Flora would. I knew if he made up his mind to



see Flora, nothing on earth could prevent him from getting to her. And I was sure a meeting with him would kill her. I was in agony every time he was there for fear Flora would hear his voice."

Again silence. Margaret saved Patrick from asking the question that hung almost visibly on his lips. She went on. "Ace Blaikie made love to Flora when she was a slip of a girl. She fell in love with him. She loved him with her whole heart and mind and soul. And when he transferred his affections to a mere light-of-love in Marshbanks, it nearly killed her. She was never the same girl afterwards. She never recovered from that. She has loved Ace Blaikie all her life. She loves him still. She can't help loving him. But she hates him too. Of course I hate him. I always have hated him. He met the death that I hoped for him—a violent one."

"No check was found on Ace's body," Patrick informed her.

"I know," Margaret arose to her feet. "I realize perfectly, Patrick, that I am now under suspicion. I hope you won't have to arrest me for a while. It would kill Flora. She doesn't know Ace is dead yet."

"I shan't arrest you for the present, Margaret," Patrick assured her. "I will ask you not to leave Satuit—not even for a day."

It seemed to me that the entire town turned out to Ace Blaikie's funeral. It was held in the white vine-covered church, the most spacious in town. The service was brief. When the pall-bearers bore the flower-wreathed coffin out of the building, a sound of weeping, like a dreary wind, ran through the church.

I did not want to go to the grave, but I did. Somehow, most deeply I desired not to see what had been the splendid body of Ace lowered into the earth . . . given over to decay . . . Yet I went. A large group of his friends accompanied Ace. Bruce Hesson was not there.

Mrs. Thelford told me that he was so sick with a bad cold that he wouldn't be able to enter Ace's will for probate before Saturday. I saw both Doctor Marden and Caro.

"I wish you hadn't felt obliged to go to this funeral, Aunt Mary," Hopedill greeted me, when I returned.

"I didn't feel obliged," I answered, "but I wanted to go. Ace was one of my oldest and dearest friends."

"Was Caro there?"

"Yes," I answered.

"She wasn't intending to go," Hopedill explained. "We were planning to go places and do things together this afternoon, to get this horror out of our minds. But after luncheon, she telephoned me that her grandfather insisted on her attending the funeral."

"They sat together," I said.

"Doctor Marden looked frightfully exhausted. This terrible thing has worn on him as much as anybody."

"I don't see why he made Caro go," Hopedill grumbled. "She says she hates funerals. She knew Ace, of course, but not awfully well."

"Well, I suppose he has the French point of view," I explained. "He's lived many years in France. There they make so much of death. Funerals and burials are extremely important events."

The telephone rang and Hopedill answered it. "Yes, she's here. Yes. Yes. Come right down!" Still holding the transmitter, he looked over at me: "Caro Prentiss is coming here."

"That's nice. She'll be just in time for tea."

It seemed to me that there was an air of suppressed excitement about her; for as we drank our tea, her foot tapped the floor. Once I intercepted an interrogative look in Hopedill's direction.

The instant I put my cup down, Caro and Hopedill put their cups down. Hopedill arose and came toward me. As though unconsciously drawn, Caro arose too, walked to Hopedill's side, stood with him looking down at me.

"Aunt Mary," Hopedill said, "Caro and I want to take you—Now don't get weepy and don't say no—we want to take you down into the Spinney. We want to show you something."

Caro's lovely voice reinforced him. "Please, Mrs. Avery, please, please come! It's something lovely."

"I'll go, children," I agreed. And then, "May Sylvia come too?"

"Yes," they chorused, "we want Sylvia to come."

"Caro and I will go first," Hopedill declared. "And you and Sylvia walk behind us."

I followed those two about the piazza, down the steps at the side, over the path into the shade of the Spinney.

Uncontrollably I began to tremble.

I fixed my eyes on the two beautiful young creatures ahead. Light and shade poured a checkered stream upon them. That stream flowed over their figures and poured into the earth. My trembling grew. Suddenly they stood aside from each other, stationed themselves one on either side of the path. Between their sentinel figures, I glimpsed—

What a transformation!

My path had ceased to take its regular turning; it curved into a great loop to the left. And on the spot where Ace's body had lain was—

"Did you two children do this?" I asked.

They nodded. I think I shall never forget the look on Hopedill's face; his anxious wistfulness. But Caro, more confident, smiled.

"I picked up two bravas to help with the rocks," Hopedill added. "And Caro went around to all your friends and begged flowers from their gardens. She did all the planting."

Some tensivity within me loosened and slid off, like a monster mental landslide, into oblivion.

To the right of the new path and opening directly on it was a rock garden. Field stones—the round, lichen-covered stones of New England—made the four walls, made at the back a triangular rock garden whose top surface slanted towards the entrance. Tiny grassy paths of new-laid sod divided the rest of the walled space into tiny flower plots. And those plots were filled—dressed with petunias, deep purple, pale rose and white; snapdragons, wine colored, pink and tawny; phlox, flame-colored, pink and white; zinnias of every zinnia color; the star-like Pride of Oxford; borders everywhere of ageratum.

"It's beautiful!" I gasped. "It's exquisite. How on earth did you do it?" I took a swift mental foray backwards. "Why that's what you've been up to these two days!"

I added: "Children, you have done a wonderful thing. It wipes out the terrible memory of—"

(TO BE CONTINUED)

## Floyd Gibbons

### Adventurers' Club

# Hello Everybody!

"The Burning Crypt"

By FLOYD GIBBONS,  
Famous Headline Hunter

IT'S always the little things that cause the most trouble. Jimmy Pezalano of Maspeth, L. I., can tell you that. It was a pencil that brought him the big adventure of his life. And while plenty of people have got into trouble for being too handy with their pens, I don't think they went through half as much grief as that little stick of wood and graphite brought to Jimmy.

It all happened on December 17, 1931, when Jimmy was working for a drug manufacturing concern in Long Island City. Jimmy was a stock clerk, and one of his duties was to check over the shipments of whisky and alcohol as they came in, and store the stuff in a big, 200-foot square, steel-lined, burglar proof vault.

That vault was the danger spot of the whole plant. In it were stored all the explosive and inflammable chemicals in the place. There were tons of such stuff as chlorate of potash, and gallons of collodion, naphtha, ether and the like, in addition to hundreds of steel drums full of alcohol. "And I was responsible for this stock," says Jimmy. "Besides myself, only the boss had the combination that would open the massive door."

Just a Pencil Started the Trouble

On that fateful December 17 that we're going to hear about, Jimmy was finding that responsibility pretty heavy. A shipment of foreign whisky had arrived just an hour before quitting time, and Jimmy couldn't go home until it was all stowed away. He and his helper hurriedly wheeled the cases into the rear of the vault and started to open them and unwrap the bottles from the straw in which they were packed. They worked rapidly for half an hour, but—

"Doesn't something always happen when you're in a hurry?" Jimmy wants to know. And I've got to agree with Jimmy. Something always does. This time it was a pencil—the only one they had. It dropped to the floor and rolled into a dark corner between two stacks of cases. They didn't want to go back to the office to get another one, so they did something that was strictly against the rules. Jimmy's helper lit a match to look for it.

That match was hardly lit when footsteps sounded outside the door. Could it be the boss? If he ever saw that lighted match in that vault full of explosives—well—somebody would get fired. Quickly, Jimmy's helper threw the lighted match into what looked like a puddle of water. Then, in an instant, that "water" had burst into flame. The "water" was a puddle of highly inflammable collodion that had leaked out of a faulty drum.

Flames Crept Toward the Explosives

"Instantly," says Jimmy, "the flames caught in some of the loose straw we had taken from the whisky cases. Tongues of fire began to lick out toward the leaky drum the collodion had come from. For a second I was scared stiff. There was enough explosives in the vault to blow the place to bits, and on the upper floors there were more than 300 people getting ready to go home."

"I leaped for a rack of sand pails, grabbed two of them and yelled to my helper to get the others. The flame was creeping up the side of the drum less than an inch from the plug hole when I threw the sand over it. Grabbing the other two pails from my helper I yelled to him to run outside, ring the alarm and hurry back with an extinguisher. Then I threw the rest of the sand. It barely sufficed to put out the collodion still burning at the base of the drum, but now the straw was burning furiously, setting fire to the wooden whisky cases."

It looked bad for Jimmy, but in another moment it was worse. He heard a loud slam—glanced at the door—and his heart almost stopped. In running out, his helper had kicked away the stick used to keep the heavy door open. It had banged shut. Jimmy was TRAPPED IN A BURNING VAULT full of explosives and the only other person who had the combination was the boss, WHO USUALLY LEFT THE FACTORY EARLY!

Jimmy Made a Gallant Fight

"I was stunned," says Jimmy. "For a moment I stared blankly at that locked door, but the acrid smoke brought my attention back to the rapidly spreading fire. There was a bare chance and I jumped for it. Like a maniac, I rolled the steel drums away from the flames. With blistered hands I pushed and jerked away heavy cases of potash until I managed to clear a small space around the flames. Every few seconds I had to stop to stamp out flying sparks that threatened to set off some stored explosive, but in the end I had cleared the space and pushed the burning straw and wood to the center of the fire. Then, with fear inspired strength, I dragged up heavy steel plates, used as a runway for hand trucks, and set them like partitions around the blaze.

"None too soon. In another minute hell popped. Cases of whisky in the center of the blaze began falling apart. Bottles went off in a series of shattering explosions. Thanks to the steel plates, none of the scattering glass and flame struck me, but I had a busy time stamping out the flying sparks and burning splinters of wood."

For a full 25 minutes, Jimmy fought that blaze. Then, overcome by heat and smoke, he was beating a reluctant retreat when the door opened and men came running in with sand and fire extinguishers.

"With my hair singed, hands scorched and my face as black as coal," says Jimmy, "I must have made a sorry figure. But boy, did that air feel good! And was I glad that my helper had enough presence of mind to run and catch the boss JUST AS HE WAS LEAVING THE BUILDING?"

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## Scraps of Humor

Only the Beginning

"Yes," said the self-made man "I was left without a mother and father at nine months, and ever since I've had to battle for myself."

"How did you manage to support yourself at nine months?" asked a listener.

"I crawled to a baby show and won the first prize. That was how I started."

Endless

"I wish my wife would not live beyond her means."

"Why does she do it?"

"Just to impress the Millers, who live beyond their means just to impress us."

The Important One

Daughter (scanning the pages)—William means "good," I see. James means "beloved" (blushing slightly). I wonder what George means?

Father (tartly) — I sincerely trust, my dear, that George means business.

Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription is a tonic which has been helping women of all ages for nearly 70 years. Adv.

A Time for Your Say

Say what you think when you can hit the bull's-eye with it.

### EMINENT DOCTORS WROTE THIS OPINION!

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## A FAMOUS DOCTOR

AS A YOUNG MAN

late Dr. R. V. Pierce practiced medicine in PA. After moving to Buffalo, N. Y., he gave to the drug trade (nearly 70 years ago) Dr. Pierce's Favorite Prescription. Women who suffer from "nervous," irritability and discomforts associated with functional disturbances should try this tonic. It stimulates the appetite and this in turn increases the intake of food, helping to rebuild the body. Buy now! Tabs. 50c, liquid \$1.00 and \$1.35.

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