

# MAXWELL, P.I.

By Shirley McNichols

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## STORY OF THE PLAY

It's 1948. Matthew "Max" Maxwell runs a successful detective agency in New York. His daughter, Maggie, has earned a degree in criminology, but Max won't let her join the agency because he feels being a private eye (P.I.) is no job for a woman.

While Max is busy looking for the elusive Alexandra Avery, an important witness against the Viola mob family, Maggie decides to prove Max wrong. She convinces her sister, Grace, that they should replace Max at novelist Helen Montrose's publicity party for her new detective novel, *Die! Swine! Die!* Maggie thinks if she can solve the phony case in Helen's new book, maybe Max will take her seriously. So Maggie and Grace join a select group of P.I.'s at Gaylin Manor on Meyer's Island, a purportedly haunted house, to try and solve the fictitious crime.

Also at the mansion are Maggie's ex-boyfriend, Jake O'Malley, a reporter for the *Times*, and his photographer, Scooter Davis. Jake and Scooter are in a bit of hot water with Max for scaring off his client Alexandra Avery. The dreaded Viola family is also at the Gaylin Manor posing as the domestic staff. The Violas have come looking for Jake and Scooter who don't know Alexandra slipped a notebook full of incriminating information about the Viola family into Scooter's camera bag before she ran away from Max. Alexandra told the Violas where it was, to get them off her trail.

A group of actors shows up to perform a scene from the book and just as they're getting started, they're interrupted by ghosts! Between the gunfire, the ghosts, the mysterious caretaker, the high-strung novelist, the detectives, the press, and a key witness for the prosecution, there's a lot of chaos and a lot of fun!

**CAST OF CHARACTERS**

*(11 M, 15 F, 2 Flexible)*

**MAGGIE MAXWELL:** Young woman who wants to be a private investigator.

**JAKE O'MALLEY:** Reporter for the *TIMES*, Maggie's old flame.

**GRACE MAXWELL:** Maggie's younger sister.

**SCOOTER DAVIS:** Photographer for the *TIMES*. Jake's partner.

**MAMA VIOLA:** Unscrupulous head of a NY crime family.

**ZELDA VIOLA:** Mama's niece and protégé.

**EDDIE VIOLA:** Mama's not too bright son.

**NICKY VIOLA:** Other not too bright son.

**MATTHEW "MAX" MAXWELL:** Tough guy P.I.

**HELEN MONTROSE:** Novelist of detective fiction.

**STEPHANIE MARX:** Helen's secretary.

**JOE HALLORAN:** Hard-boiled detective.

**FRIEDA NIGHTSONG:** Mysterious housekeeper.

**MRS. ALBRIGHT:** Fuddy-duddy woman detective.

**HERBIE SATIN:** Womanizing P.I. really a producer in disguise.

**RAMONA:** Herbie's airhead secretary-actress.

**SIR SIMON DOUGLAS:** British, Holmsian style investigator.

**\*DR. BENEDICT:** M.D., and Sir Douglas's sidekick.

**TINA:** Vain actress.

**LINDA:** Level headed actress.

**STELLA:** Hard working actress.

**JORDAN:** Actor, taken with Tina.

**CRAIG:** Actor, also taken with Tina.

**ALEXANDRA AVERY:** Witness for the prosecution.

**DORIS:** Housekeeper.

**PHOEBE:** Housekeeper.

**\*MARTHA GAYLIN:** Heiress to the Gaylin Manor.

**LOUIS GAYLIN:** Heir to the Gaylin Manor.

\*Could be played by male or female

## **SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY**

### **ACT I**

Scene 1: Office of Maxwell Investigations.

Scene 2: Drawing room, Gaylin mansion.

Scene 3: Drawing room, Gaylin mansion.

### **ACT II**

Scene 1: Drawing room, Gaylin mansion.

Scene 2: Drawing room, Gaylin mansion.

## **SETTING**

The Maxwell office should be simple, just Grace's desk, the coat rack, and the door. The drawing room can be made up to look like an elegant Victorian parlor, but as no one had lived in the mansion for sometime, it shouldn't be in great repair. In addition to sofas, chairs, end tables etc., there could be old bookcases of books, an antique chandelier. There are exits SL as well as USR and DSR.

## **PROPS**

GRACE: Hat, coat, stacks of papers, invitation, old non-electric iron, large shoulder bag.

MAGGIE: Hat, coat, gun.

MAX: Hat, coat, gun.

JAKE: Overnight bag.

SCOOTER: Overnight bag, large camera bag with notebook, old-fashioned camera with flash bulb.

NICKY, EDDIE: False beards and mustaches, 2 guns, 2 trays of finger foods, 2 sheets, 2 flashlights, butler outfits.

MAMA: Long haired wig, opposite of actress' natural color.

STEPHANIE: Clipboard.

LINDA, CRAIG: Gun each.

ZELDA: Gun and maid outfit.

MARTHA, LEWIS: 2 sheets, 2 flashlights, several suitcases, overnight bags, hats, coats, rotary telephone.

## **SOUND EFFECTS**

Telephone, gunshot, scream, iron clank, mournful wail.

**ACT I**  
**Scene 1**

*(AT RISE: GRACE sits at a desk in the office of Maxwell Investigations. A coat rack stands to the right of the desk. Grace's hat and coat are on it. There are numerous papers and envelopes on the desk as well as an old rotary phone. Grace is writing and lets the phone RING twice before answering it.)*

GRACE: Maxwell Investigations. How may I help you?  
*(Pause.)* Oh, hi, Jake! How's the newspaper business?  
*(Pause.)* I know what you mean! How's Scooter? Does he ever ask about me? Oh. Well, tell him I said "hi" anyway. Are you calling for Max or Maggie? *(Pause.)* Of course I know it's over between you and Maggie. It has been for months! But I'm sure she still loves you, and I'll bet you still love her, so I figure it's just a matter of time before one of you comes to your senses and - *(Pause.)* What? An invitation to Helen Montrose's publicity party? Yeah, I think he did. *(Looking through stacks of letters and papers on the desk.)* I'm pretty sure it's here somewhere ... Here it is! It's addressed to M. Maxwell, P.I. *(Opening it and taking out the note.)* It says, Your presence is requested at the Gaylin manor ..." Hey, that's the haunted house out on Meyer's Island! *(Pause.)* Well, some people say it's haunted! Anyway, it's this weekend and, oh! It says he can bring a guest! I can hardly wait! I've always wanted to spend the night in a haunted house! Oh, well actually, Jake, Max hasn't seen the invitation yet. He's been awfully busy. But I'll show it to him the minute he comes in. *(Pause.)* Don't worry, there's plenty of time! It says here the last ferry leaves at eight o'clock. *(Pause.)* Mad? Why would he be mad? Sure, I'll tell him, Jake. *(Pause.)* Okay! It's important! I got it. *(Pause.)* Good! Then I'll see you some time tonight. Uh, should I tell Mags you called? *(Pause.)* Okay, okay! Calm down! It's over! I got it! *(Hangs up the phone.)* Over my eye!

*(MAGGIE enters SR and hangs her hat and coat on the rack.)*

MAGGIE: Hey, Gracie, heard from Max?

GRACE: He's at the D.A.'s office.

MAGGIE: Oh, yeah? What's up?

GRACE: Same thing. The Viola case. Problem with their star witness, Alexandra Avery.

MAGGIE: That's understandable. I'd be terrified if I thought the Viola family was after me.

GRACE: No kidding. That Mama Viola and her boys are scary. Viola Enterprises has a finger in every illegal activity on the East Coast.

MAGGIE: Yeah, but without Alexandra Avery, the D.A. hasn't got a case.

GRACE: Imagine working for those people for two years! She's lucky she got out alive with all she knows.

MAGGIE: Max says she kept meticulous records. Anyway, she's a lot better off in protective custody with Max looking after her, than she would be anywhere else. Trouble is, this protective custody thing is taking up so much of his time. *(MAGGIE looks through Max's mail.)*

GRACE: Yeah, but you know what Max said. They just can't trust the regular police for surveillance right now. Mama Viola's got informants everywhere! Anyway, Max also says Alexandra's quite a dish. Maybe he'll ask her out when this whole thing's over.

MAGGIE: I doubt it. I sure wish Max would quit being so bull-headed and take me on as a partner. He needs me! And I'm more than qualified! He's such a big lummo!

GRACE: Oh, speaking of big lummoes, Jake O'Malley just called.

MAGGIE: I hope you told him I'm not interested! The man needs to get on with his life!

GRACE: Actually, he wasn't calling for you. He was calling for Max.

MAGGIE: Oh. Well, did he ask about me?

GRACE: No.

MAGGIE: Not even, you know, how's Maggie doing?

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