

Boston Blackie
The TV Poisoning
Dec 20, 1945

MUSIC (sounds like old time movie organ music during a suspenseful scene).

Blackie
Comfortable, Mary?

Mary
Mm, hm, very. Is it time yet?

Blackie
In a minute or two. Swell apartment my friend Charlie Kingston has here.

Mary
Well, it was nice of him to let us borrow it so we could use the television. Imagine seeing Inspector Farraday on a television screen.

Blackie
It's one of the nicest ways of seeing Farraday. You know, so near and yet so far away?

Mary
Turn it on, Blackie, will you?

Blackie
Okay. Let's see what this little knob does.

Mary
Well, the screen's lighting up.

Blackie
Edison and Blackie, one and the same.

Mary
Oooh.

Blackie
Hey, I see something on the screen.

Mary
Yeah, so do I, but its a little blurred.

Blackie
They must be televising Farraday's mind. I think it needs a little sharper tuning.

Mary
The set? Or the mind?

Blackie
Both.

Mary

Laughs.

Blackie

Hey, that's better, isn't it?

Mary

Much. Oh, oh, Blackie, there's Farraday!

Blackie

Yeah, I see him. And three other men around a table. Well, in as much as they're broadcasting a civic forum, that's as it should be.

Mary

You know our friend the inspector seems a little nervous, doesn't he?

Blackie

Because he's hitting the water pitcher? He probably read somewhere that all speakers drink a glass of water before they go on.

Mary

Well, the other members of the forum must have read the same thing.

Blackie

Mmm. It's hot in a television studio, Mary.

Mary

You know, Blackie, it's hard to realize that here we are sitting at home, watching and listening to something taking place miles away. Don't you think television is wonderful?

Blackie

Oh, I don't know, it'll never replace the horse.

Mary

You know, I think it's about time you told me I was wonderful, too, Blackie.

Blackie

I don't think you'll ever replace the horse either.

Mary

Hm.

Blackie

Hey, hey, I think that's Inspector Farraday.. Yeah. Yeah. Now it's his turn to speak. I'll turn the radio part on.

Mary

Good. This is going to be fun.

Announcer

And now, ladies and gentlemen, we continue our round table discussion by presenting an outstanding civic leader, Cyrus Baxter. [clearing throat sounds, clapping]

Mary

Oh, it's not Farraday after all. Shall I turn it down?

Blackie

Oh, let's hear what Baxter has to say. I think Farraday should follow him, he's sitting next to him.

Mary

Mr. Baxter seems to be a bit thirsty, too. Well, he's finally put down that water glass. Now maybe he'll ...

Blackie

Sh, sh.sh.

Mr. Baxter

Ladies and gentlemen, I have come here tonight for a specific purpose. To make accusation against one of...[choking sounds]

Mary

Hey, hey, what's happening to him? He's grabbing his throat!

Blackie

He's choking, Mary.

Mary

Look, but he's falling, Blackie, right into Farraday's arms.

Blackie

Which means that somebody laid a murder right in Farraday's lap!

ORGAN MUSIC.

[Sound of crowd murmuring]

Blackie

There's Farraday over there with the police photographers, Mary.

Mary

He looks awful worried, Blackie.

Blackie

He looks confused, but then, he always does, I think.

Mary

Well, darling, Farraday really is in a spot this time. If Baxter was murdered with Farraday right in the room, the police commissioner will do some plain and fancy screaming, and you know it.

Blackie

[Laughs] No question about that. Hold it, honey, we've been detected. Here comes the Inspector.

Mary

Ah ha.

Blackie

Hi, Farraday?

Farraday

Blackie, before I do anything else, I've got one thing to say to you. Get out a here.

Mary

Hello, Inspector Farraday.

Farraday

Hello, Miss Wesley. I'll make that two things, Blackie. Get out and stay out. Oh, have I got troubles.

Blackie

I know. I saw you by television. You photograph badly.

Farraday

I'm not talking about that. And you know it. Cyrus Baxter was standing right next to me when he was murdered.

Blackie

Then he was murdered, eh? Tsk, tsk. Why did you do it, Farraday?

Farraday

What do you mean, why did I do it? I didn't kill him, Blackie. Now beat it.

Blackie

Sure, Inspector. Did you find out yet what poison was used?

Farraday

Poison? Who said it was poison? How could it be poison? I drank from the same pitcher a water. So did everybody at the table. We weren't poisoned, were we?

Blackie

Well, I don't know. How do you feel, Inspector?

Farraday

I feel great. I feel like throwing you right out a here.

Mary

Oh, Blackie, why don't you stop, darling? Inspector Farraday has enough...

Blackie

I'm sorry. Say, Inspector, Baxter was just about to accuse somebody of something when the poison hit him.

Farraday

Now who said it was poison? I told you it couldn't be poison.

Officer

Excuse me, Inspector Farraday. The medical examiner just finished with the body. He says to tell you Baxter was poisoned by the water. [Blackie chuckles] He won't be able to identify the poison 'til after the autopsy. [Blackie chuckles again]

Farraday

Okay. Oh, Blackie, beat it! I'll take it from here alone.

Blackie

I'll go, but you won't be alone, Inspector. There's a person heading this way right now with purpose in his footsteps and you in his mind.

Mary

Do you know him, Inspector?

Farraday

Oh, that's Rex Daniels. He was secretary to Mr. Baxter.

Daniels

Inspector Farraday, I've got to talk to you for a moment.

Farraday

Ah, not now.

Blackie

I think you better listen to him, Farraday. And now.

Farraday

Nobody tells me what I better do. What do you want, Daniels?

Daniels

Inspector, I know what Mr. Baxter was going to say when he fell dead. I helped him prepare the indictment.

Blackie

What kind of indictment was that, Daniels?

Daniels

Uh, who are you?

Farraday

[Sarcastically] Oh, he's Boston Blackie. Hmm. Who was Baxter going to indict?

Daniels

A man named Thomas. Ralph Thomas. Mr. Baxter was going to expose him to the forum members. We knew he was farming out city contracts and costing the taxpayers additional money.

Farraday

Thomas, eh? Hey! We all had dinner at his house tonight!

Blackie

Who's all, Inspector?

Farraday

Well, me, Baxter, Ralph Thomas, then there was...

Waters

And I, Inspector Farraday.

Farraday

And you, too, Waters!

Blackie

Waters, eh? What do you do?

Farraday

Shut up, Blackie. Mr. Waters has political connections. Very good ones, too.

Mary

Oh, I remember you, Mr. Waters. I saw you on our television set.

Waters

Yes. Yes, I was scheduled to speak before...well, before the unfortunate accident.

Blackie

It wasn't an accident. It was murder. Someone wanted to keep Baxter quiet. Farraday, you say you had dinner at Ralph Thomas's house?

Farraday

Yeah, four of us. Baxter, Mr. Waters, Thomas, and I. Hey, Thomas could have poisoned Baxter then!

Blackie

And have the poison take effect exactly at the right moment, Farraday? I don't think that happens except in books.

Farraday

So you don't think it happens. Well, who cares what you think? I'm gonna go to work on Thomas right now. Are you sure Baxter was going to accuse Thomas, Daniels?

Daniels

Of course I'm sure.

Waters

Well, you're giving us some action, Inspector. That's all I wanted to be sure of. Come on, Daniels.

Daniels

Yes, sir. Thank you, Inspector Farraday, thank you very much. I was very fond of my employer.

Farraday

Yeah, I know. Wait a minute...do you figure to step into his job, Daniels?

Daniels

Well, I...I hadn't thought about it much, but...I guess I am the only one who could handle it right away...

Farraday

That's all I wanted to know. You can go now. But I'll be seeing you. And you too, Waters.

Daniels

Goodbye, Inspector.

Waters

We'll be seeing you, Farraday.

Mary

[petulantly] Hey, hey, does anybody remember I'm still here?

Farraday

See that you stay here. And keep Blackie with you. I'm going to see this Ralph Thomas.

Blackie

That's right, Inspector. Between the two of us we'll make him talk.

Farraday

Yeah, he's gonna talk between the one of us! And that means me! And it also means you're gonna keep away from his house. Far away. You got that? So long, Blackie.

Mary

Goodbye, Inspector.

Farraday

Oh, Miss Wesley, I'm sorry, goodbye.

Mary

[fondly] Goodbye.

Blackie

Come on, Mary.

Mary

Would it be impolite to ask where to?

Blackie

The phone booth. I'm going to call this Ralph Thomas and arrange to meet him before Farraday can get to him. And the subject we'll discuss when we meet will be another man's poison.

MUSIC

[Dialing phone. Ring]

Butler

Ralph Thomas residence.

Blackie

Hello, is Mr. Thomas at home?

Butler

I'm sorry, sir, he is not.

Blackie

This is Inspector...uh, Allen, of the police. Did you serve the dinner at Mr. Thomas's house tonight?

Butler

Why yes, Inspector. Of course I did.

Blackie

I just wanted to be sure it was you. Tell me one thing, who cooked the dinner?

Butler

I did, sir. It's one of my duties. Was anything wrong?

Blackie

I don't know yet. Tell me this, did everyone at the table eat the same food?

Butler

Oh, yes, sir, and every bit of it, too. If you'll pardon me and there's nothing else, this is my night off, and I was just about to leave the house.

Blackie

One thing more. Do you know where Mr. Thomas is?

Butler

This is his bowling night, sir. The Academy Alleys. You might find him there.

Blackie

Thank you very much. Goodbye. [Hangs up phone] I'm in luck, Mary.

Mary

Oh, yes, yes, Blackie? What?

Blackie

Yes, Mr. Thomas has gone bowling, Mary, and the chance to see him alone is right down my alley.

MUSIC

Sound of bowling ball striking pins.

Joe

How'd it go tonight, Mr. Thomas?

Thomas

Swell, Joe, had a 165 average for seven games.

Joe

Not bad, not bad.

Thomas

Good night, Joe.

Joe

Good night, Mr. Thomas. See you same time next week.

Thomas

Right, Joe. Good night. [Door opens, closes, street sounds]

Blackie

Mr. Thomas, I'd like to see you at the same time, this week.

Thomas

Who are you?

Blackie

Boston Blackie. The name mean anything to you?

Thomas

Vaguely. You were looking for me?

Blackie

That's pretty apparent, isn't it? Mr. Thomas, did you know that Cyrus Baxter was murdered tonight?

Thomas

[quietly] No, I didn't. How did it happen?

Blackie

You don't seem very upset.

Thomas

There isn't much difference between life and death. It's the presence of one because of the absence of the other, if you follow me.

Blackie

It's a little beyond my depth, Thomas, but murder isn't. By the way, Baxter did have dinner at your house?

Thomas

Yes, that's right, he did. So did Inspector Farraday of the police. And Richard Waters. Were they poisoned too?

Blackie

I never said that Baxter was poisoned.

Thomas

No, you didn't. But you mentioned he was murdered and brought up the fact that he had dinner at my house. Pretty obvious conclusion, don't you think?

Blackie

Either an obvious conclusion or definite knowledge. Look, Thomas, you're in a spot. Baxter was preparing to expose you publicly at that forum. Did you know that?

Thomas

No. But it's possible. My business is a little out of the ordinary.

Blackie

Just what is your business?

Thomas

Just what business is it of yours?

Blackie

Actually, none. But the police are after you, and if you're innocent it's just possible I might be able to help.

Thomas

You don't think I poisoned Baxter?

Blackie

No, I think you're too smart to do that. Wait...come to think of it, this had to be a pretty smart stunt.

Thomas

What are you talking about?

Blackie

Four men had dinner together, and later three of those men drank from the same water pitcher. The water was poisoned but only one man died. That's a pretty good trick.

Thomas

Tell me, how it was done.

Blackie

Maybe you'll tell me. First of all, did all four of you eat the same food at dinner.

Thomas

Identical. Uh, cream soup, roast beef, boiled potatoes, lima beans, uh, dessert, coffee. Baxter had no coffee. Is that important?

Blackie

You know it's not. Who prepared the dinner, Thomas?

Thomas

Jones, my butler, he's a very good cook.

Blackie

I talked to him earlier. I understand he has the night off. Will he be home later?

Thomas

I think so. He has an apartment over the garage. Generally in by midnight on his night off.

Blackie

I think I'll go to see him. Maybe your butler will open the door to a solution of this case.

MUSIC

Mary

Blackie, darling, this is my idea of completely nuts.

Blackie

How can you say that, Mary.

Mary

Oh, it's easy, I'll show you. Blackie, darling, this is my idea of completely nuts. See?

Blackie

We're on the trail of a killer, gal. En route to what may turn out to be a killer's quarters in yon garage.

Mary

So suppose we find the butler. Then what?

Blackie

Then we...sh.

Mary

[whispers] What?

Blackie

Someone's following us. Get into these bushes, quick.

Mary

Well, all right, but I don't hear any...hey, hey, I do hear footsteps.

Blackie

Keep out of this, Mary, I'll handle this...

Mary

[loudly and frightened] Blackie!

Blackie

I mean wait here quietly! Sh! I'm gonna grab him, and baby when I grab somebody they stay grabbed!

MUSIC

Announcer

[over gradually more distraught organ music] While Blackie and Mary Wesley were watching by television, Cyrus Baxter fell dead in the television studio, just as he was about to indict Ralph Thomas, political lobbyist. Thomas's secretary, Rex Daniels, and Richard Waters, a civic board member, are under suspicion, as well as Thomas, but investigation showed that Baxter was poisoned, and that he had had dinner, with the others, at Thomas's house. A search is made for the butler who cooked and served the dinner. En route to his quarters in the Thomas garage, Blackie and Mary realize they are being followed, and Blackie JUMPS on the man! [Sound of fight]

Blackie

[voice over muffled sound of man trying to speak with gag in his mouth] Well, friend, that ought to hold you for a while. How do you like your face getting a massage?

Mary

Did you get him, Blackie? Ooh!

Blackie

Got him...and exercise. Give me the flashlight, Mary, so I can see what I nabbed, and what kind of a head I'll have hanging in my trophy

room.

Farraday
Blackie!

Mary
Oh!

Farraday
Blackie, you dope! Let me up!

Mary
Oh, it's Inspector Farraday. Oh! Blackie!

Blackie
Darling. I'm sorry, Inspector. I didn't know it was you. Here, let me help you up.

Farraday
What's the idea of hopping on me?

Blackie
I didn't know it was you. What was the idea of trailing me?

Farraday
I didn't know it was you, either. I saw two figures...

Mary
One of them was mine...the good one.

Blackie
Mary.

Mary
Well.

Farraday
Cut it out, both of you. Where are you going, Blackie?

Blackie
Well, nowhere. Just, out for a stroll.

Farraday
Yeah, I know. Me, too. Only, I took my stroll first. I got to this garage twenty minutes ago. Nobody answered the door at Thomas's house, so I thought I'd try here.

Mary
Was there anybody in the garage, Inspector?

Farraday
Nobody to speak of. Just a corpse.

Mary
That's nobody to speak to. Uh, was it the butler?

Farraday

Yeah. Knifed. I'd give a lot to know why.

Blackie

[Smugly] I could tell you.

Farraday

I don't want to know that badly. Come on, let's get into Thomas's house and wait for him to come home.

Blackie

All good policemen have skeleton keys, eh, Inspector?

Farraday

I've got something better. You. Now, look, can you open that back door, Blackie?

Blackie

I don't know, I haven't seen it yet. Past performances in my favor.

Farraday

I know. There it is. Go to work.

Blackie

Okay. This is awfully illegal, Inspector.

Farraday

Yeah. Murder is a little bit against the law, too. How you coming?

Blackie

Pretty well. There. The door's unlocked.

Farraday

Well, open it!

Blackie

All right. [Sound of opening door]

Farraday

Gas, Blackie. I smell gas!

Blackie

Keep out of the way, Mary! Come on, Inspector! Put your handkerchief over your nose and come on!

Farraday

Okay, I'm with ya.

Blackie

Break that window, inspector.

Farraday

Put your flashlight on it so I can see what I'm doing.

Blackie

Right over here.

[Sound of breaking glass]

Hey, look, Inspector, that body on the floor. It's Thomas.

Farraday

Well, that makes the third one. First Baxter, then his butler, now Thomas here. He killed the first two and then committed suicide. Well, that washes this case up.

Blackie

Yes, Inspector. Come here, quick.

Farraday

Now what is it, genius?

Blackie

Nothing that you'd be interested in, except Thomas isn't dead. We broke in here just in time.

Farraday

Not dead? But he's got to be dead. This room is loaded with gas from that kitchen range.

Blackie

Not too loaded. Whoever did this might have wanted it to look like suicide, but didn't stuff the cracks under the doors and we broke in in time to save Thomas. Look at this bump on the back of Thomas's head.

Farraday

He got it when the gas hit him and he fell off that chair.

Blackie

He could have gotten it when somebody hit him, turned on the gas and left him here.

Farraday

That's what you think. As soon as Thomas revives, I'm taking him to headquarters and booking him for murder.

Blackie

Go ahead. But get an apology ready, kid. You're gonna need it when it turns out that Thomas is innocent.

MUSIC

Just keep driving anywhere, Mary. It doesn't matter where we go...as long as I have time to think.

(Sound of cars passing, horns honking)

Mary

Do you have time to think out loud?

Blackie

I suppose so. Mary, would Thomas be clever enough to fake an attack on himself, hoping to throw us off the track?

Mary

Well..what would he hope to gain, Blackie?

Blackie

Well, he could hope to throw suspicion on somebody else. Ralph Waters, or Rex Daniels, Baxter's secretary.

Mary

You mean he figured you'd break in in time to save him?

Blackie

Maybe. What bothers me too is that poisoning of Baxter. Farraday tells me there was poison found in the water that everybody at the forum drank. Yet it affected only Baxter. Now, how can that be?

Mary

Well, I don't know. Would, um, would finding a motive help you, Blackie?

Blackie

No, not in this case, Mary. Everybody had a motive.

Mary

Don't they always in mystery stories?

Blackie

Invariably. Only mystery stories generally wind up with a solution. I'd like to know what this one is.

Mary

You'll find it, darling. I know you will.

Blackie

That line came out of the same mystery story.

Mary

Hey!

Blackie

Well, let's go to work. Suppose you drive me to Ralph Waters [should be Richard Waters! ed.] house, and as the dog said when he went flea hunting, we start from scratch.

MUSIC

Waters

I don't think there's anything further I care to say to you, Daniels, and certainly nothing further I care to hear from you. Good day.

Daniels

Not so fast, Mr. Waters. I happened to be very fond of Mr. Baxter.

Waters

I admire that very much. Good day.

Daniels

Mr. Waters, you had opportunity to poison that drinking water at the television studio and reason enough to want Mr. Baxter dead.

Waters

So did you, for that matter.

Daniels

I had reason?

Waters

Baxter's job. You've got it now. Maybe you'd better leave, before I start putting pieces together.

Daniels

You're trying to insinuate I killed Mr. Baxter, the man who gave me the only chance I ever had?!!! I could kill you for saying that!!!!

Waters

[choking, as with Daniels's hands around his throat] Stop it....you're choking me.....stop it!

Blackie

Better stop it, Daniels. Take your hands off him.

Daniels

What do you want here, Blackie?

Blackie

Mr. Waters alive, for one thing.

Waters

Have him arrested, Blackie! He...he almost killed me just now!

Blackie

[Cheerfully] Yes, I know, I saw that. And it gave me an idea. All I've got to do is put that idea of mine into execution and both of you had better hope it isn't your execution I'm talking about.

MUSIC

Farraday

Lights hurt your eyes, Thomas? Too bad. Go on, talk.

Thomas

Inspector Farraday, there isn't anything I can tell you except what I've already told you. I know nothing of how Mr. Baxter or my butler were killed, or who tried to kill me and make it look like suicide.

Farraday

Thomas, I'm gonna....!

[phone rings]

Oooh. [picks up receiver] Yeah, Farraday speaking. Well, what is it, Blackie? You want me to do what? Are you kidding? Of course I won't. Sure I want to solve this case. And that's the way to do it, heh? [sarcastically] Okay, what can I lose except a couple of hours. Yeah, right away. Eight o'clock tonight is okay. Bye. [hangs up receiver] Thomas, [very cheerfully] you're going to have a dinner party at your

house again tonight. And then we're going to the television studio, just like we did last night.

Thomas

[coldly] Well..what's the reason for all this, Inspector?

Farraday

Blackie's idea. He says he's going to make the murderer show his hand, so he can get a look at his face.

MUSIC

Blackie

Gentlemen, as you know Inspector Farraday, Mr. Waters, Mr. Thomas and I have just come here to the television studio from a dinner where we ate exactly what was served at the dinner last night.

Waters

This farce is a little late in getting started, isn't it?

Thomas

That's what I thought....

Blackie

Maybe, Mr. Waters, but the ending is worth it.

Farraday

Come on, Blackie. Come on. Do something.

Blackie

I will, Farraday. I'll start with a roll call. First, Inspector Farraday of the police.

Farraday

What do I do now? Bow?

Blackie

Not until this case is solved. Rex Daniels, secretary to the late Cyrus Baxter.

Daniels

Here.

Blackie

Richard Waters, member of the City Finance Council.

Waters

Here, Blackie.

Blackie

And Ralph Thomas, political hanger on. Holding no office but packing a lot of weight.

Thomas

Thank you, sir.

Blackie

It's very hot in the studio under these lights, gentlemen. Here, in this pitcher of ice water, we'll all be able to have a drink. But I'm going to improve the taste a little. The small bottle I asked you for, Inspector, please.

Farraday
Here y'are.

Blackie
Thanks. There's poison in this water, gentlemen. The same poison that killed Baxter. I'm going to pour it into the water pitcher. [Sound of liquid being poured into water] And now I'm going to drink a glass of the water. [Sound of water being poured into empty glass] There. Now, here's a glass of water for you, Waters, for you Thomas, and for you, Daniels. And for you, Farraday.

Farraday
Uh huh.

Blackie
Now, I want all of you to drink the water together. Come on now, one, two...

Daniels
No, no, I can't do it, I tell you, I can't...

Blackie
Drink it, Daniels. At the count of three. One...two...three.

Waters
[Sound of broken glass. Panicky] I won't do it! It's murder! It will kill all of us!

Blackie
I drank it, Mr. Waters, remember?

Waters
Sure! Sure, you drank it! But you took an antidote at dinner! You had it in your coffee! And you wouldn't serve coffee to any of us! He's trying to murder us all! Don't let him! I'm going to get out of here! I won't drink that water!

Blackie
Grab him, Farraday! He's your murderer! Richard Waters!

MUSIC

Mary
I'm listening, Blackie.

Blackie
I'm gloating, lovely one. Where shall I begin?

Mary
With the reason that Waters killed Baxter.

Blackie

That was because Baxter was going to indict Ralph Thomas. Thomas had to have a partner, in a city job, that partner was Waters. If Baxter named Thomas, Thomas would pass the buck to Waters. Catch on?

Mary

Catch on. Um, I know why the butler was killed, too. Waters had bribed him to put the antidote in the coffee he served at the dinner, and later killed him to keep him from talking.

Blackie

Nice going! Waters knew Baxter drank only milk, and so he had the antidote place in the coffee by the butler. He believed I had done the same thing before I drank the water and that gave him away.

Mary

And Waters later tried to kill Thomas and make it look like suicide so that Thomas would be suspected. How am I doing, Blackie?

Blackie

You're wonderful, Mary.

Mary

But I still don't replace a horse, eh? Well, I think you were wonderful, taking a chance on drinking that water you had poisoned.

Blackie

Don't be silly. I knew I hadn't any poison in that water.

Mary

What?

Blackie

It was just more water I added, that's all. Tricky, eh?

Mary

[In a hard voice] Yes, darling, you're tricky, huh. And I'm thirsty, huh. So, I'll pour myself a little water.

Blackie

I do all the talking and you get thirsty. That's what I call a close friendship.

Mary

Well, I'll answer that when I'm through drinking.....now, what was it you....oh, Blackie! Blackie!

Blackie

What is it, Mary? What!

Mary

My throat! My throat! Blackie, I'm falling...

Blackie

It's all right, dear, I'm holding you! What is it? What's the matter!

Mary

Mmmm. Well, with you holding me [in a sultry voice], nothing's the

matter. I'm a little tricky, too, darling.

MUSIC