



The Curious  
Accounts of the  
Imaginary Friend

P.S. Gifford

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A VIRTUAL TALES BOOK

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The Curious Accounts of the Imaginary Friend

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THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY FATHER,  
ERNEST GIFFORD,  
WHO INSPIRED ME MORE THAN HE COULD EVER REALIZE.  
ALSO TO MY WIFE, SARAH, AND MY SON, JONATHAN,  
FOR THEIR INFINITE PATIENCE, SUPPORT AND  
ENCOURAGEMENT, WITHOUT WHICH THIS BOOK  
WOULD HAVE NEVER BEEN COMPLETED.





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**W**ell, your *Imaginary Friend* is back! What happens when a woman marries for money instead of love? Can she be happy? What if she finds that she can stand her husband no longer? Mary Higgins summoned me one afternoon and told me the beginning of the story. As I sat silently and took her tale in (for *Imaginary Friends* are avid listeners), the realization came upon me that I might never find out the end of her story! But as luck would have it, the man who found her called me one evening and told me how it all ended... but I am getting ahead of myself.



### 3

#### LONG MEMORIES

Mary Higgins sat looking at the screwdriver in her hand, and then looked at the body of her dying husband at the site of the new house they were having built. It was a muggy afternoon: August 2, 1956. She had only married Sam a few months earlier; she supposed it had more to do with family convenience than love. Mary had never loved Sam, never had the slightest romantic interest in him, not even on their wedding night.

No, the only reason she had married into the Nichols family was for money. Simply put, her family had none, and their family had plenty. Her father had worked down in the coal mines and died before his fortieth birthday, as had many others like him. She determined that it was a reasonable sacrifice; her happiness in exchange for being able to take care of her three sisters and aging mother.

These were hard times in West Virginia. She had met Sam almost a year before, at a local church dance. He was immediately attracted to her, as most men were. The combination of a slim yet shapely figure combined with her raven black hair and green eyes

aroused most men's passions. Yet, Sam had what most men in these parts didn't—a sizeable bank account.

The first few weeks had been bearable. She had finagled to get an allowance for her unmarried sisters and as a result, they managed to keep a roof above their heads and food in their bellies. They had rented a small house on the outskirts of town, and Mary entertained herself in her garden. She also adopted a young black terrier named Eddie who never left her side—much to the chagrin of Sam.

At first, Sam idolized Mary, for she was a fine prize; he paraded her around the fashionable places the way a proud farmer would delight in showing off his finest hog. The Nichols had made all their money three generations back in the lumber business; ravaging the land of its trees had helped them amass a small fortune. In his eyes, Mary was just another beautiful thing his money empowered him to possess.

The newlyweds decided that a new house was to be built, or rather Sam decided, as he made *all* the decisions. It was going to be the largest and grandest house the city of Binkley, West Virginia had ever known. The house was going to have seven bedrooms and three bathrooms, on five acres of the greenest fields you would ever wish to see.

It was on a Sunday afternoon when the construction was halfway through that it happened. This Sunday started off like every Sunday; the construction workers were enjoying their only day of rest, and Sam came to examine their work from the week. As is typical during West Virginia summers, the air was humid and hot. Mosquitoes were buzzing about with wild abandon; Sam had been bitten several times. It was funny that Mary rarely was bitten, yet, for Sam it was a regular occurrence. Perhaps this was nature's way of seeking revenge on the family who had destroyed so many trees, and neglected to replant.

Sam was in an irritable mood as he examined the work completed on the building during the previous week. He was becoming more and more dissatisfied with the project, constantly grumbling at the slow pace of the builders—and this from a man who had never completed a day of physical labor in his entire life!

As was typical, Mary had been dragged along as well, and if she went anywhere Eddie was not far behind. The couple explored the

new basement of the house; the walls had already been half bricked up. This was where the wine cellar was going to be, and as Sam produced the masonry, Eddie accidentally got underneath his feet, and Sam fell. His head smashed into the pile of bricks and he squealed, then quickly pulled himself to his feet.

Mary had seen him upset on many occasions, but what happened next was exceptional even for him. Perhaps it was the heat, and his nerves were raw, but Sam reached down, grabbed Eddie by the throat, and shook him violently. As the poor dog's life was abruptly being shaken out of him, Eddie whined helplessly. Suddenly, Sam dropped the dog and keeled over.

There stood Mary, and in her hand was the bloodied screwdriver, which she had used to stab her husband in the back of the neck. Eddie scurried to the safety of his mistress, who reached down to scoop him up with her empty hand.

She looked down and saw that Sam seemed to be writhing a bit; so he was not quite dead. She thought about facing a charge of attempted murder, and as she had gone this far already, she decided that the best way out would be to complete the job. She spied a sizable piece of lumber and with surprising calmness and clarity of mind proceeded to smash it repeatedly on Sam's skull. A horrified Sam tried to fight her off, but between the injury and the shock at being attacked by his prized possession, his attempts were futile.

Now Mary had another problem. How was she going to dispose of the body? She realized that the answer was right in front of her... the bricks. She would simply place her husband behind the uncompleted wall and finish the job herself.

Dragging his body was harder than she imagined. Sam enjoyed the good life, including fine food and wine in extravagant quantities. She finally managed to drag the oversized body towards the wall, and an hour later an exhausted Mary managed to situate Sam behind it.

She considered the bricks and the mortar. She figured that about four to five hundred bricks were going to have to be laid to completely fill in the hole. Glancing at her watch, she realized that she had fourteen hours to complete the task before the workmen returned in the morning.

Unfazed, she set about the grim task at hand. She awkwardly set the first few bricks in place and discovered it was much harder than

it looked. Yet she persevered, for she had watched them laying bricks often enough and after an hour she became surprisingly proficient at it. At five thirty, as the sun was starting to set, with Eddie lazily sleeping a few feet away, she was ninety percent finished. All she had to do was fill in the final fifty bricks. It was then she heard it—her husband’s voice.

As she gazed bewildered between the unfinished bricks, she screamed. Her husband’s glaring eyes were staring back at her. He had apparently been unconscious, and now realized his fate.

“I swear I shall get you,” he hollered.

Mary started putting the bricks in place a little quicker, perhaps not as meticulously as her earlier work, yet, nonetheless good enough.

“Let me out of here!” she heard, a little fainter this time.

Finally, the last brick was put in place. The faint muffled cry still managed to echo through the walls.

“I will have my revenge...” the voice whispered.

Mary glanced at her watch, it was almost six. The workmen would be there in three hours. Would he be silent by then? She quickly cleaned up the job and with Eddie at her side hopped into the Lincoln Continental and drove back to their current residence.

As you might imagine, there was a sizable investigation into Sam’s disappearance at first, and yet the truth of the matter was that beside his elderly parents, no one much cared about Sam. Mary concocted a story that he had spent the day hunting by himself, and simply never returned. A flimsy story perhaps, yet Mary’s attractive manner tended to help men believe whatever she told them.

Two months later, Sam’s father unexpectedly passed away. His mother’s death followed a few weeks later; both apparently of natural causes. Young Mary went on to inherit the Nichols’ vast fortune, including the now completed mansion. Mary, it seemed, had gotten away with murder.



It was the morning of Mary’s seventy-sixth birthday that was to change everything. As she swung herself gently on the porch in

the now overgrown garden of the home she had lived in for almost fifty years, she could not fail to smile. She had never remarried, yet shortly after the house was finally completed she and her three sisters and their mother moved in. Only her youngest sister, Elsa, married, and she and her husband also lived in the house.

She never once considered what happened to Sam after that day, for no one was ever allowed down into the cellar. It had been locked, sealed, and forgotten all these years, and yet, that very morning she was forced to reflect on it after all these years, for a government official had paid her another visit.

Binkley had changed over the last half century, and now she was being forced to sell all but half an acre of the large grounds she thought she owned. Her attorneys had tried to prevent it, but the lease on the land was coming up, and she had been issued a court order to sell her home. Her house was destined to be knocked down and a modern condominium building was going to take its place, all in the name of progress.

As she lingered over a sip of her iced tea, she knew that she was going to have to deal with her haunted past and explore the cellar. Despite being in her late seventies, fate had been kind and had blessed her with relatively good health. She was still spry and nimble enough to get about and function by herself.

Her latest companion, the fifth in a long line of loyal black terriers looked up lovingly at her. It was funny she often thought that this dog, Chester, could almost have the spirit of her first dog, Eddie, inside him. They shared a similar temperament, heart, and soul. Eddie's eyes had concealed a vast wisdom in their deep brown hue, and so did Chester's.

She had outlived her sisters and mother, and for the last three years had been living with only Chester for companionship. The money had gradually been depleted, for she and her sisters enjoyed living well. Now the house was on its last legs, just as she surely was. Soon the house would be gone, and she supposed she would eventually follow suit.

As Chester's loving gaze followed her she opened the bottom cabinet in the kitchen, where numerous old keys were stored; her eyes were drawn to a sparkling key. It was the key of Sam's old 1952 Lincoln. The car had long since gone, yet the spare key still sat in

this drawer, where it lay hidden for nearly half a century. As she fumbled amongst old faded papers and miscellaneous junk, she finally came across the large brass key—the one that would soon be unlocking the cellar.

The last time she held that key was several weeks after the incident, when the house had been completed. They had handed her a set of keys for the house. The very first thing she did was to lock that cellar door, and place the key in the drawer.

Nervously clasping the key, she walked to the back of the kitchen and opened the door that led down to the cellar. Her nostrils were filled with stale putrid air, and it made her cough uncontrollably. Chester instantly leaped up and peered into the darkness himself; his mistress was evidently afraid of something, and he dearly wanted to protect her.

Mary was not expecting the light switch to work after all these many years, yet, startlingly enough, it did. The dim bulb illuminated the descending steep staircase. Cobwebs adorned virtually every corner and crevice. Mary shivered. Memories of the incident raced through her mind, as clearly as if it happened yesterday.

With Chester gallantly trotting at her heels she began her descent, grabbing the handrail for dear life. She had no idea what she was going to do. How could she possibly demolish those bricks, set with her own hands? She examined her hands, wrinkled and liver spotted; they had been so dainty once.

It took her a few minutes to reach the bottom of the staircase. Taking a deep breath, she reached for the key in her pocket. It was then she heard it. Surely, that was a cry. Or maybe an old frightened mind simply playing tricks? She could not muster enough courage to place the key in the lock. Yet she knew she must, or else her long deep secret would be revealed to the world, and she would die in prison alone, without her best friend Chester. No, she had to find the courage. She reached down and tenderly scratched Chester's ear. Chester responded by licking her hand encouragingly. She smiled to herself. Yes, this dog surely had Eddie's spirit.

Again, she heard a noise that sounded like a cry. No, no, it must be the wind! It had to be! Yet, she had a hard time convincing herself to place the key in the lock. Finally she did, but it was reluctant to turn, for its mechanics had long since been lodged in one place. She

tried again with more force, her arms trembling at the exertion. The key began to gradually turn until it opened with a click.

She reached up for the light switch, petrified as she tugged at the old string, but this time she was not rewarded with light. She opened the door fully, and the swinging light bulb from the stairwell behind her revealed haunting shadows that danced on the wall.

As her eyes slowly adjusted to the muted light, she stared in total panic and disbelief at the place where she had entombed Sam. There was a hole in the wall, a gaping hole...


Mary screamed and collapsed to the floor.



“The body has evidently been there for several days,” the police inspector calmly explained to the reporters who were gathered outside the Nichols’ house. “We found Mary Nichols collapsed at the bottom of the stairs leading into the cellar. Her hungry and thirsty dog was sitting at her side, whimpering and licking the dead body. It was the strangest thing though; we initially thought it had been a terrible accident, that she had simply fallen over and hit her head. We were very surprised to find an old screwdriver sticking out of the back of her neck...”



**M**ary’s husband was a man of his word, wasn’t he? But have you ever tried to contact a dead relation? A psychic once summoned me and told me a most curious story...



P.S. GIFFORD was born on April 28, 1965 in Birmingham, England. From a remarkably early age, he discovered his fascination with the written word. By the age of nine he was devouring several books a week and began to write. In the early 1980s P.S. Gifford and his father relocated to the California coast, which he has cheerfully called home ever since.

While in college, Paul wrote a few stories, but as he got older alas writing was relegated onto his hectic life's "back burner" and he barely wrote a word of fiction for over fifteen years. However, in 2004 all this was about to abruptly and delightfully change, as that was the year when he realized that despite a serene contented existence an important aspect in his life was missing: the written word. So, once more he began churning out in abundance short stories. And the rest, as they say, is history.

Since then he has written well over one hundred short stories and has had numerous tales published. P.S. Gifford lives in Lake Forest, California. He is married, has a son, two dogs, a rabbit and an endless dream ...





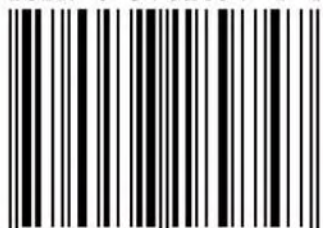
RIP

## Who Am I?

Well, I am the imaginary friend.  
You know—the one you conjure up for  
conversation when you're consumed with  
loneliness, greed or visions of imminent doom. I  
have listened to thousands of stories and it would  
be a shame if they just stayed with me, never to  
be heard again. I have chosen to share only  
the ones I found to be particularly... curious.  
Have you ever been troubled by nightmares?  
Were you relieved when you woke up? No  
matter. Are you sure you can tell the difference  
between the nightmare and the waking state?  
Think it through before giving me your answer.  
Sometimes only an imaginary friend can truly  
listen to your deepest troubles and most  
distressing woes.

Wouldn't you agree?

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