

## Murder at the St. Regis

Barbara Stewart Zick

"It was wonderful!" Patty said, as she and Ed Martin rode across 47th Street to the swank 5th Avenue apartment of Frank Mallory. "Simply wonderful, and to think that we saw the opening." She snuggled up to Ed and pressed her lips against his cheek. "Being a private detective does have its lighter side after all," she laughed, "and we are even invited up to the big man's apartment for the party! Nice work if you can get it," she crooned.

"Don't forget, I'm working," he reminded her.

"If you can call this work, just watching some females model their jewelry."

"It's still work, and I'm getting paid for it, and after a few more jobs from people like Mallory we'll be able to furnish that little apartment we've wanted for so long."

Patty looked out at the changing pattern of lights, as they sped along the street, and thought about a small apartment, and being married to Ed. Tall, blond, kind Ed with that wonderful smile, what a lucky girl she was! It would be heaven! Then she thought about tonight's party.

It was in honor of Honey Deering, the new star of "Dancing Feet" that had opened just a few hours ago on Broadway. Everyone at the opening had said that the play was a success, and Patty was sure of it. The stars were perfect, the music already on the hit parade, and the plot was light and entertaining.

The taxi threaded its way across 6th Avenue through the late theater traffic that surged along the streets, and soon stopped in front of the St. Regis. Patty and Ed stepped out under the green and white striped canopy that wavered in the soft spring breeze. "Gee, it's a wonderful night," Patty sighed, "a really wonderful night for a party." They walked into the thickly carpeted, quiet lobby. Patty tugged at Ed's coat sleeve. "Just let me stand here and breathe in all this luxury," she pleaded. He chuckled and pushed her along to the small elevator. They stepped inside, pushed a button, and within a few moments the door silently opened onto a small foyer. A large white louvered door was opened by a tall middle-aged butler, and they walked into the apartment of Frank Mallory.

The room was a soft sea of blue. French furnishings of light fruit wood and tall silver lamps glowed and warmed the still blue of the walls and carpet. The couches and chairs, with their slender gracefully carved legs, were upholstered with Beauvois tapestry. A large crystal chandelier hung from a richly carved paneled ceiling, and light reflected from its prisms like a million warm candles. A pink marble fireplace and a huge rococo mantle held two Sevres bisque figurines. The petite young woman glanced coyly over a delicate fan, and her lover held an outstretched lace-cuffed arm invitingly toward the Renoir landscape behind them.

"It's all just beautiful," Patty whispered to Ed as they walked to the door opposite the fireplace and out onto a small terrace, where a few early couples danced to the music of a small orchestra. The lilt-ing rhythm of the band sent Patty into the arms of her tall escort, and they swayed to the tempo of the music, Patty on tip toe pressing her soft brown hair against the chin of her partner.

People began to arrive now in small groups to keep the all-night vigil, waiting excitedly for the reviews that would, they all agreed, mean success for "Dancing Feet." Chic bejeweled women talked to men who nodded and laughed politely. Celebrities, gay and witty, circulated through the growing crowd. Two women columnists talked together. One of them, Kay Randall, was the top columnist for a leading paper. "Imagine that," Patty said looking toward her, "the first Mrs. Mallory is here this evening. This should be interesting."

"Why shouldn't she be here?" Ed asked. "After all, she is the star's aunt, and is probably getting material for her column."

"I guess that's right," Patty agreed. "That was a long time ago anyway, I mean when she and Mallory were married, back in the days when he was connected with the underworld, wasn't it?"

"Be quiet, Patty, remember where you are!" Ed said.

A well-known politician danced by cheek to cheek with a young attractive redhead. Ed followed her with his eyes, until he felt Patty's cold gaze.

Several members of the cast arrived just then, along with Mrs. Mallory, and her sister and brother-in-law, Dr. Harold Jelkings. The doctor carried a small black bag and the three of them walked to the door of a small library across from the foyer, smiling and speaking to a few people in the crowd. "I suppose Dr. Jelkings has a couple of snakes in that bag," Patty said. "You know he works with them all the time. He just got back from South America, the paper said."

"Don't be silly," Ed chided her, "he works on neurotoxins, not actually with snakes."

A deep loud laugh from the foyer focused everyone's attention on Frank Mallory, who stepped through the door with Honey Deering clinging to his arm. Shouts of, "Hi, Frank." "Honey, you were wonderful!" rose from the people gathered in the living room. Honey, in her best professional manner, smiled and waved to every-one.

"Sure she was wonderful!" Mallory boomed, "best little actress on Broadway." Mallory, a large man with keen grey eyes, and a shiny bald head, lifted a drink from a tray carried by the butler, who had been working busily through the crowd, and walked toward the library. Honey waved to her aunt, who seemed to be disturbed about something, and was immediately surrounded by a group of admiring men.

"Look at the dress, isn't it the most beautiful thing you ever saw, Ed?"

"She sure is," he agreed.

"You are to watch the accessories, not the women," Patty reminded him curtly.

The orchestra was playing the hit song from the show, and Honey and her leading man, Jack Dawning, hurried out to the terrace, and began singing and dancing to the melody. "This is better than the show," Patty cried. "What fun!" Ed turned and looked over the people gathered in the living room. Mallory was setting fire to the logs in the fireplace, and Ed thought he saw a flutter of paper.

"He probably lights his fire with dollar bills," he laughed to himself. Yes, Frank Mallory had come a long way. Ed could remember reading in the newspaper morgue of Mallory's early days, when living had not been so easy. Brought up on the lower East Side of New York, he had lost little time in learning how to cope with life's problems. Now he was known to have one of the keenest minds on Wall Street. Even if he had not been the successful man he was, it would have made little difference. Margaret Woodard Mallory and her sister were both heirs to the Woodard fortune. When she had married Mallory the gossip columns had declared that this was a match disapproved of by the Woodard family, especially since Mallory was rumored to have underworld connections.

People near the fire moved out to the terrace. The song was over and everyone was dancing. Mrs. Mallory and the Jelkings joined the group in the living room. Soon the orchestra was quiet and Frank Mallory moved to the middle of the room and raised his hands. "Folks," his base voice sounded, "I've got a surprise for you tonight. Hank Thurston," he said pointing to a small red faced man that seemed to be with Kay Randall, "has just got back from India and he has a little surprise for you. Want to tell them about it, Hank?"

Henry Thurston looked at his watch. "In about 45 minutes you are all going to meet someone that I brought back for my Saturday night T. V. show. I know you are going to like him. That's all I'm going to tell you now!" The crowd buzzed with excitement. Henry Thurston's acts were always a sensation. He turned to Kay and Honey, who stood near the terrace door.

"He is the one who gave Honey her first break," Patty chattered, "I wonder if he is interested in her?"

"If he isn't, he's crazy!" was Ed's reply.

More music from the show, another song by Honey, a dozen toasts to the new play, and a few incoherent speakers filled the next few moments. Patty loved every minute; her sparkling brown eyes moved eagerly over the crowd.

Soon a murmur rose from the couple near the door. Standing in the doorway to the foyer was the tallest man Patty had ever seen. A dark-skinned man attired in a tuxedo, but unmistakably an Indian stood searching the crowd with deep set eyes. Thurston hurried

across the room to greet him. "Folks, this is Kali Daphur who can tell you exactly what you have on your mind, so look out!" The dark man moved to the fireplace and seated himself on a low stool. The crowd pressed together and looked curiously at the stranger. A hush fell over the crowd. Someone switched off the light coming from the library, and Henry Thurston turned off the living room lights. Only the feeble glow of the embers from the fireplace lighted the room. "I don't like this," Ed whispered to Patty, "it's too dark in here." The Indian began to moan and mumble to himself.

"Evil is with us tonight, . . . someone is going to" . . . A short cry came from one side of the room. Then another cry from the same direction. There was movement in the crowd and then suddenly the lights flooded the room. Honey Deering rose from her chair, took a few steps, and crumpled on the floor. Ed and Kay Randall rushed to her. They knelt beside the girl.

"Honey, Honey, baby," Kay moaned. A dagger pierced her bare shoulder. Henry Thurston walked to Honey and laughed.

"It's alright, folks, just a little joke to liven up the party," and he pulled a dummy dagger from her shoulder. "Get up, it's over, Honey. Honey . . ." Then he stared down at the girl. "What's the matter with her?"

Dr. Jelkings knelt beside the body, and looked closely at the girl's left shoulder, pointed to a small red mark, and whispered something to Ed Martin. Ed stood up and looked at the people who stared down at the girl's body. "Honey Deering has been murdered. Will all of you please go out to the terrace and wait there until the police arrive?"

The crowd, speaking in whispers, turned and walked to the terrace. Dr. Jelkings, Mallory, Patty and Kay Randall remained in the room. Kay began to weave unsteadily and suddenly fell to the floor. Dr. Jelkings and Ed carried her to a nearby couch and Patty began talking softly to the unconscious woman, and rubbing her wrist and face.

"Let's go into the library, gentlemen, I have a few questions to ask you," Ed ordered.

"What is it?" Mallory asked as they walked to the library. "I don't see anything wrong with her."

Ed walked to the telephone, dialed a number, spoke quietly into the receiver, then hung up.

"I just can't believe it," Jelkings said, as he walked to the desk and opened his small black bag.

"Would someone please tell me what is going on in my own house?" Frank Mallory's voice was impatient.

"It was this," Jelkings said pointing to a small vial in the open bag. "I have been working on a new serum for one of the most poisonous reptile bites in South America, but can find no cure. A small scratch from a needle dipped in this could kill a dozen men. Mr. Martin, I suggest you find the murder weapon at once."

"I would be glad to, Doctor. Do you have any idea where it could be? Or could you tell me exactly why you would carry such a thing to a party?"

"I don't know anything about this, Mr. Martin. I suggest you spend your time looking for the murderer instead of intimidating innocent people. As for the bag, I was going to drop it at the lab on the way home tomorrow morning. I arrived in New York late this afternoon from South America and the lab was closed."

"Alright, Mallory, what do you know about this?"

"Well, Hank Thurston and I thought up the idea as sort of a gag."

"Just a minute," Ed stepped to the door. "Hank Thurston," he said loudly across the room. Kay Randall was sobbing in Patty's arms. Thurston came through the terrace door and walked rapidly to the library. "Alright, Mallory, go on."

"Well, Hank and I thought this would ease a little of the tension you know, waiting for the reviews and all, and give the folks a thrill."

"That's right," Thurston said nervously, "I got this Hindu mind reader to go along with us and Jack Dawning was to slip the phony dagger to Honey when I turned off the lights. She was to stick it on and scream, then after a few seconds, I was to turn on the lights and after we gave the crowd a scare we were going to explain the whole thing. That's all that there was to it," he said wiping a handkerchief across his reddened face.

Ed called to Jack Dawning, who entered the library. "What was your relationship with the girl?" Ed asked.

"We started in show business together and were engaged until about a year ago. We both agreed to call it off, and we left as friendly as we had ever been. Then we started on this show about six months ago, but we were just friends. She had plenty of money from somewhere and didn't need me."

"What do you know about what happened here tonight?" Ed asked.

"It was supposed to be for laughs, just for laughs. I was to pass the dummy knife to Honey when the lights went out, and she was to take it from there. But I couldn't find the thing at the theater and after I got here Honey said that she had hidden it in the chair and I wouldn't have to bother, so I just kept quiet and went along with the gag."

"Is that true?" Ed turned to Mallory and Thurston.

"I don't know anything about that," Thurston said. I told you all I knew about it."

"How about you, Mallory?"

"I had nothing to do with that part of it," he said gruffly.

"Someone's lying," Ed said, "come on out with it."

"That was the truth," Dawning whined, "why should I lie to you?"

"Alright, I want all of you to go out with the others and wait until the police arrive," Ed said. He walked to the desk, picked up the bag, and walked into the living room.

Mallory's voice came through the door. "I don't like being ordered around in my own house."

Thurston and Dawning were talking quietly to each other.

Ed walked past Patty and Kay Randall, who was still lying on the couch sobbing, to the fireplace and then to the still body of the girl, where he stood silently for several minutes. Then he turned quickly, looked at the grey ashes in the fireplace and walked rapidly toward the library. Thurston and Dawning left as soon as he entered and Mallory stood by the desk and glared at the detective.

"Nice spring evening," Ed said. "Too nice for a fire, wasn't it?"

"Now look here, Martin . . ."

"I think I can tell you what this is all about now, Mallory. Or are you ready to tell me?"

Mallory laughed nervously, "What the devil do you mean? Do you think I would have you here if I was mixed up in this awful mess?"

"You didn't really know this would be necessary until tonight, did you?" And Thurston's little presentation gave you a perfect opportunity. She gave you something on the way to the apartment. Could it have been a letter? That was the reason for the fire. You didn't want to bump into Dawning during the murder, so you talked her into slipping the dagger into the chair herself. Then when the Hindu appeared at the door you slipped into the library, dipped a sharp pointed object, probably a needle, into the bottle in the Doctor's bag and waited to turn off the light. It was pretty close timing. Honey gave the fake cry before you could get to her chair. When you pierced her arm with the needle, she was frightened. That was the reason for the second cry. She'd been blackmailing you, hadn't she, Mallory? Am I right? What did she have on you?"

"Get out of here, you crazy fool," Mallory snarled, "you'll never prove anything!"

"What was she blackmailing you with, Mallory?" Ed repeated.

"I can answer that," Kay Randall said, as she walked slowly into the room, "She found papers that proved Frank was the head of an underworld syndicate years ago. It would have sent him to prison. You thought they were burned in a warehouse fire years ago, didn't you, Frank? I've had them all this time. I didn't know that Honey knew anything about them until I opened the safe tonight to get my jewelry and found the envelope open. Then I knew why she had spent so much time with you, and how she got the lead in the play. I begged her to stay away from you. I thought she was in love with you. I should have told her . . . I should have told her. It's too late now," she sobbed walking toward Frank Mallory. "No one knew, . . . not even Honey . . . even you never guessed. Honey was your daughter."

Mallory staggered back, and sat down in a chair. "It isn't true, it can't be true," he whispered. "What have I done?"

"Remember after we separated," Kay continued, "I left New York for a while, remember? After Honey was old enough she grew up in private schools. She thought both of her parents were dead. No one knew but me," she began to cry again.

The large man seemed to age visibly as he sat in the deep leather chair. Then he began to weep. Bitter tears that came from the steel grey eyes not accustomed to the sting. He took a neatly folded handkerchief from his pocket and began to wipe his eyes and face.

Ed and Kay turned toward the open door. Someone had entered the apartment and was talking to Patty in a loud voice. The conversation stopped and Patty and two policemen came through the door, stopped and stared at the figure in the chair. Frank Mallory had stiffened and now he fell back into the deep chair. A damp handkerchief and a bright shiny pin fell to the floor.

## Mardi Gras

Nancy Stassus

MISS ADAMS slipped the last manila folder into the green filing case and stepped back. "Well, that's over for another week," she murmured. "Let me see, I'll put these two letters under the paper weight and send them out Monday."

What a cute little paper weight, she thought. A tiny church inside a glass ball. I bought it in St. Louis, the year Aunt Jane died. She shook the little sphere. The artificial snow inside the ball floated around like little scraps of paper.

"Well, five-thirty. If I don't hurry, I'll miss the bus," she exclaimed. She fluttered over to her desk and reached for her hat. Picking at the veiling she re-arranged the bobbing pink rose. "I'm so excited. What a surprise I have for Martha tonight," she giggled.

On the bus she thought of how she would tell Martha of her plan. She'll be so surprised, even shocked! But when you make a decision, you have to stick to it. Just get up and go. That's the only way.

Trees standing straight as pencils flashed past Miss Adams as she rode along the boulevard. Such a lovely night, she thought. In the seat in front of her, a tired girl leaned her head against the window and yawned. Not very lady-like, thought Miss Adams.

That night, after the dinner dishes were washed and Tibby, the cat, had eaten his milk and liver, Miss Adams announced her surprise.

"Martha, I'm going to the carnival tonight. The one that came to town yesterday. Now, don't tell me it isn't safe. I'll be all right. But I've never been to a carnival and I do so want to go."

After Martha was convinced, the two planned what Miss Adams should wear.