

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.

"Something simple, I think," Miss Adams announced. "I think I'll wear my flowered dress. The one with violets at the neck." She dressed carefully and pinned her change purse inside her pocketbook. You just can't be too safe, she reasoned.

"Now, do be careful," Martha warned as she left. "I'll wait for you. I won't sleep until you come home."

Miss Adams arrived at the carnival grounds as the evening activities were beginning. Rainbow-colored balloons were pouring out from two red and white striped buckets at each side of the arched entrance. Just like bubbles going up in the water cooler, thought Miss Adams. A red-haired woman and her cigar-chewing escort bumped into her. "Oh, excuse me," Miss Adams began. "Well, that wasn't too polite."

She walked along the sawdust-carpeted midway. A neon-outlined ferris wheel swung up in front of her.

"Here, Lady. Twenty cents a ride for the thrill of a life-time! Come on!" screamed the pudgy barker. "Come on, Lady!"

Miss Adams smiled. No, I really couldn't. It wouldn't be quite proper, she thought. But it would be daring. No, I don't think so.

The cry of the barker melted into the roaring of the motorcycle exhibit from a large wooden drum down the path. What a horrid noise, she mused. I shouldn't think a person could stand that very long.

A wave of warm, buttery pop corn and sweet candy apple smells rolled across the crowd as she trotted past the side shows. A large brunette was doing a tap-dance on a rickety platform in front of "Little Old New York." Her heels clacked against the dusty boards like finger nails along typewriter keys.

My, it's so hot and dusty, thought Miss Adams as she reached a squatting brown tent. "Watermelon. Ice Cold Drinks. Sandwiches," read the words on the blue-checked canopy. She stepped inside and sat down near a white table.

"Your order, Lady." A sweating man in a soiled apron hovered over her.

"I'll have a slice of watermelon, thank you," Miss Adams smiled. She reached in her purse and pulled out a gold-colored compact. After powdering her nose with quick, little dabs, she looked around the room.

A young man with slick black hair was staring at her over a water-beaded glass. His plump girl friend chattered to him as he continued watching.

Miss Adams blushed and looked away. Heavens, he is staring at me. That silly boy. Why, I'm old enough . . .

The young man turned to his friend. "You see that character in the funny-looking dress? Real homely, isn't she? Wonder what she's thinking about?"

"Thinking?" the girl screeched. "Who cares? What's the matter with you tonight anyway?"

"Yah, you're right," he answered as he turned away.

Well, thought Miss Adams, I'm certainly glad he stopped watching me. But I shan't give him that chance again.

She clutched her purse under her arm and wandered back towards the crowd.

But I couldn't resist smiling a little, she thought. That silly boy. Oh my, I didn't even wait for my piece of watermelon. That waiter must think I'm rather foolish.

Miss Adams stopped to watch the pony-ride concession. A little boy was screaming and pulling on his father's coat.

"I wanna ride! I wanna ride!" he wailed.

"Stop that, stop that this minute," snapped his mother, dragging him away from the stand.

How cruel, how terribly cruel, Miss Adams murmured to herself. If I had a child, I certainly wouldn't be so mean to the little darling. . . . Goodness, look at the time. I should be getting home. Martha will be so worried. I'm so thoughtless at times.

Miss Adams pushed through the crowd towards the entrance gates. On the bus she thought about how she would tell Martha about the evening. I think I'll tell her I rode on the ferris wheel. After all, I almost did. And it would be so exciting to say.

Miss Adams reached the apartment and turned the key in the lock.

"Is that you?" called Martha, as she plodded across the hallway.

"Yes, Martha. Oh, I had a lovely time tonight. I rode on the ferris wheel . . . It was so exciting. And my stomach just turned over and over. It really did. Just like it did when I got the twenty-year's service award at the office. I was that frightened!"

"Oh, my dear," began Martha.

"And a man tried to pick me up. He really did. Right there at the carnival."

"Weren't you afraid?"

"No, of course not. I know how to handle those situations. And I saw all the shows. And, well, I'll just have to tell you all about it in the morning."

"All right, dear. I know you must be exhausted." Martha groped her way back to bed.

Miss Adams stood for a moment in front of the hall mirror, then turned toward her bedroom. A few minutes later she removed her flowered dress and carefully hung it in the lavender-scented closet.

After wiggling into a ruffled pink night gown, she sat down on the edge of the bed. Tomorrow, she thought as she stretched out between the cool sheets, I shall not get up as early as usual. I think I shall sleep until . . . until almost noon!