

STAR WITNESS

By Billy St. John

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SYNOPSIS

Did Julie Marshall beat her fiancé to death with a fireplace poker? Her attorney, Sam Zangrillis, thinks he can prove her innocent, but District Attorney Adrienne Bancroft, a former friend and colleague of the deceased, is out for blood. The solution to the puzzling case is revealed at the shocking climax of this exciting trial drama.

Colorful witnesses who testify during the proceedings include Julie's roommate and alibi, Karen Wood; police detective Lt. Dexter who investigated the murder; the dead man's spiteful sister; and his flighty artist neighbor.

One easy-to-stage courtroom set. Let extras or audience members serve as jurors and courtroom spectators without the hassle of nightly rehearsals.

For a taut drama of compelling power, "Star Witness" will win the verdict.

I wish to dedicate "Star Witness" to two members of my family whose help in writing murder mysteries is invaluable: my medical expert, my brother-in-law, John McDonald, and my legal expert, my sister-in-law, Monica St. John.

*With love and appreciation,
Billy St. John*

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(3 M, 7 W, 3 flexible parts)

SAM ZANGRILLIS: A defense attorney, mature, assertive, successful and well-dressed.

KAREN WOOD: Pleasant, mid-20's, high strung.

JUSTINE SUITER: The prison matron, stern.

JULIE MARSHALL: The defendant, mid-20's, pretty, intelligent.

ADRIENNE BANCROFT: Prosecuting attorney, beautiful, forceful.

***TONY (TONI) DELVECCIO:** The bailiff.

***JUDGE ROBIN MYERSON:** Mature, commanding.

***LEE McGIVER:** The court stenographer.

DR. JAMES TREVOR: The coroner, has seen the worst of human nature.

LT. PHILLIP DEXTER: A police detective, thorough, precise.

DIANE HOLGATE: The murder victim's sister, earthy, bitter.

MELINDA LAWSON: The victim's neighbor, an artist, a dreamer.

BETTY RICE: A businesswoman.

**Parts may be played by men or women.*

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

TIME: The present.

PLACE: A courtroom.

ACT I - A Monday morning.

ACT II - That afternoon.

PROP LIST

Preset Props

Judge's bench: Gavel, papers, pen.

Evidence table: Poker, raincoat.

Stenographer's table: Steno machine or steno's notepad
and pencil.

Bulletin board: Crime scene drawing.

Personal Props

Sam: Briefcase with papers, handkerchief.

Adrienne: Briefcase with papers.

Tony: Gun with blanks, holster, Bible, tags and pen.

Phillip: Notebook, key, hair samples, bone sample, 2
documents.

Diane: Handkerchief.

Betty: Magnifying glass.

Between Acts

Add to evidence table: wig in carrying case.

Move hair samples from Adrienne's table to the evidence
table.

ACT I

(AT RISE: The courtroom is empty except for SAM ZANGRILLIS standing UPS of the defense table. His briefcase is open before him, and he is examining some legal papers. After a beat, KAREN WOOD enters through the double doors, SR. She appears somewhat nervous.)

KAREN: Mr. Zangrillis?

SAM: Karen...come in. *(KAREN crosses through the gate to SAM. They shake hands.)*

KAREN: Am I too early?

SAM: Not at all. The matron should be bringing Julie in shortly. *(Indicating the US chair at the defense table.)*
Here, sit down.

KAREN: *(Sitting.)* Thank you.

SAM: *(Crossing SL a couple of steps.)* How are you?

KAREN: I'm a little shaky. I've never seen a murder case being tried before, let alone be involved with one.

SAM: You'll do fine. Julie's counting on you ... you're her only witness.

KAREN: I know. I took a couple of Valium before I came in. They'll help relax me.

SAM: Valium?

KAREN: Yes. I've been under a doctor's care for my nerves for several months now. It's been very stressful ... moving to a new town, finding a job, and a roommate. I was lucky there ... Julie is a dream to live with. She's so kind and understanding. That's why I have to help prove that she's innocent. She could no more have killed Barry Holgate than...than I could! I won't let you down, Mr. Zangrillis ... I swear I won't!

SAM: I trust you.

KAREN: If only I can convince the jury that Julie didn't leave the apartment the night Barry was murdered. Apparently the police didn't believe me ... they arrested her in spite of what I told them.

SAM: *(Crossing SL to the prosecution table.)* They found a witness who swears she saw Julie drive up to Mr. Holgate's cabin that night. It'll be a matter of her word against yours. *(Turning back to KAREN and perching on the edge of the table.)* I believe the rest of the prosecution's case is built on circumstantial evidence. I feel sure we'll be able to prove that this witness, a Melinda Lawson, couldn't possibly identify the figure driving by her place on a dark night as being Julie Marshall ... not without a shadow of a doubt. That's the key word ... doubt. Judge Myerson will instruct the jury that they must not find your roommate guilty unless each and every one of them is totally convinced she took a poker from the fireplace there and bashed in Barry Holgate's skull.

KAREN: When you put it that way, it sounds as if we have a good chance of winning.

SAM: *(Crossing to CS.)* We do. Don't get me wrong ,, it won't be easy. The district attorney, Adrienne Bancroft, is an excellent lawyer. She also has a reputation as being a ruthless adversary. Considering the fact that she and the murder victim had been close friends as well as associates, I have no doubt she'll be out for blood. You mustn't let your guard down with her for an instant.

KAREN: Oh, dear.

SAM: *(Crossing to RC.)* I don't mean to frighten you, but I feel it's necessary to warn you about the Panther Woman - that's what the other lawyers call Adrienne behind her back. She didn't get to be the district attorney by batting her eyelashes, although she is a very attractive woman. Just tell the truth as you know it and you'll be all right.

KAREN: I hope so. I'm not good at confrontations ... I never have been. Even when I know I'm right I get so emotional that I can't stop from bursting into tears and making a fool of myself. I'm doing better, though. Dr. Mendez, my therapist, told me I am. I'm sure he's right. The medication helps a lot.

SAM: I'm glad to hear it. It might be rough, but we'll get through this ordeal just fine.

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KAREN: We have to, for Julie's sake.

SAM: Yes - for Julie's sake.

(The door UL opens and JUSTINE SUITER, a prison matron, enters. She is a stern looking woman in a dark suit.)

JUSTINE: Mr. Zangrillis?

SAM: *(Turning toward HER.)* Matron Suiter.

JUSTINE: I understand you requested to speak with Ms. Marshall before the proceedings begin?

SAM: *(Crossing to UL.)* Yes, I did.

JUSTINE: *(Looking off SL.)* You can come in.

(JULIE MARSHALL, the defendant, enters UL. She is a pretty woman, intelligent and normally outgoing, though she is subdued at the present. Her most striking feature is her bright red hair. She wears a simple, dark dress. KAREN rises and rushes to UC where Julie meets her. They embrace.)

KAREN: Julie...oh, Julie!

SAM: *(To JUSTINE.)* If we might have a few minutes alone, I'll take responsibility for Ms. Marshall.

JUSTINE: Very well. If you need me, I'll be in the next room.

SAM: Thank you.

(JUSTINE exits UL, closing the door behind her.)

KAREN: Oh, Julie, I couldn't wait to see you! I've missed you so much. I roam around the apartment with nobody to talk to but the cat.

JULIE: At least Percival is a good listener. Is he okay?

KAREN: He's fit as a fiddle. He misses you, though. If he disappears, I can always find him curled up on your bed.

JULIE: Give the old boy a hug for me.

SAM: *(Crossing to SL of THEM.)* Hopefully, you'll be able to give him a hug yourself soon. I don't expect the trial to last long.

End of Freeview

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