



It Happens in the Dark

Carol O'Connell

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The reviews called it “A Play to Die For” after a woman was found dead in the front row. It didn’t seem so funny the next night when another body was found—this time the playwright himself, his throat slashed. Detective Kathy Mallory of the NYPD Special Crimes Unit takes over, but isn’t getting a straight answer from anyone. Not the lead actor, a movie star fallen on hard luck; not the lead actress, a nervous sort with a dependence on pharmaceuticals; not even the wardrobe mistress, working under an alias; and certainly not the twin actors so unnervingly convincing playing psychos.

Now, backstage, someone has left Mallory a message on the blackboard: Tonight’s the night. Nothing personal. It appears that she is being written into the play itself, a play about a long-ago massacre that may not be fictional after all.

If Mallory can find out who’s responsible, heads will roll. Unfortunately, one of them might be her own.

It Happens in the Dark Details

Date : Published August 5th 2014 by G.P. Putnam's Sons (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9780425270875

Author : Carol O'Connell

Format : Paperback 480 pages

Genre : Mystery, Fiction, Crime, Suspense

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From Reader Review It Happens in the Dark for online ebook

Connie says

It was almost painful to give a Carol O'Connell Mallory book only two stars, because from the beginning of her books, I have adored this series and anxiously awaited the arrival of each Mallory mystery. Regrettably, I have found Mallory less interesting as the series has continued, significantly less likable, and importantly, less believable. This is Ms. O'Connell's creation, and she can portray her as she sees fit; she has stated in interviews she is aware that she has a winning character. However, consider this: people are influenced and changed by events in their lives. Mallory--in spite of what should have been an epiphany, a life-altering experience (the finding of her birth father after many years of searching in "Find Me")--appears unchanged by this event, and indeed, it is never mentioned or alluded to in subsequent novels.

One has to wonder why she has such a loyal and devoted group of people in her life, from wonderful sensitive, homely Charles who remains inexplicably in love with Mallory, to her partner Riker, and friends of her deceased father's. She is virtually never nice to any of them and delights in one-upping them at every turn; her character does not grow, but remains static. What is her appeal? She never seems to respond in ways that make her sympathetic or human. She responds with a kind of petty, robotic meanness to the people who always forgive her, always look out for her, and continue to love her.

And where did she get this power Riker describes, to strike fear and awe in the hearts of every person--and animal--she meets, simply with a "look"? Why do some of these people not simply disregard her posturing, or laugh at her and walk away, as most would in real life? Her "power" is simply not believable. If Ms. O'Connell wants to create a super-heroine with indefinable and inexplicable powers, then she has failed with Mallory. All Mallory's posturing would not strike awe, but rather it would promote the kind of annoying feeling one gets with an impotent bully. Hence, Mallory has become a caricature of her earlier self, fixed and immutable, not very believable, and now, alas, somewhat irritating.

I found the explication of the plot often confusing and difficult to follow; it seemed choppy to me, and not Ms. O'Connell's best writing. Carol O'Connell has been a master wordsmith, and innately possesses a special gift for writing heart-wrenching scenes and characters. These gifts were not highlighted in this novel.

For the above reasons, I found this book to be disappointing and not up to her usual standards. My greatest concern is with the characterization of Mallory who appears to have devolved into self-centered meanness from the wounded warrior as she was described in the earlier books. Nonetheless, I will no doubt be chomping at the bit waiting for the next chapter in Mallory's life, and seriously hoping to see some character growth in a more positive and realistic direction.

Eyehavenofilter says

Well....lets see, when you've figured out " whodunnit" within the first 100 pages, and its been verified by page 200 or so, wrapping it all up in the next 150 pages is just...exhausting.

I wanted to like this alot more than I did. Sadly I found the characters less than one dimensional and contrived. I did find Buggy interesting however, (sigh)

the contrivance of a former crime connected to the present serial crimes just took too blasted long for me, and made all the police involved look stupid, lazy, or withholding evidence for some unknown reason. not something I'd appreciate if I was a hard working blue blood.

Wendy Jones says

I love Carol O'Connell's Kathy Mallory Books and this one is as good as, if not better than, all the rest. Kathy Mallory is a detective with no feelings and a myriad of inner demons. These are so deep seated it makes your average inner demon look al pink and fluffy in comparison. This makes mallory a complex character. I have to admit that she grows on you throughout the series and she shows flashes of being almost human in this one. There are a number of strands to the book, but the author skilfully weaves then into one tense whole. The action mainly takes place in a theatre which one would think would limit the drama. However, this is not the case. The lives of the actors and their characters are so interspersed it is difficult to tell fact from fantasy. This makes for interesting reading and so many twists and turns it made me feel dizzy. The theatre itself also provides a sinister backdrop to the story. Mallory is no ordinary cop and the normal rules of investigation do not seem to apply to her. She breaks the rules at any given moment and will do whatever it takes to solve the case. I think this adds a certain something to the whole proceedings as you never know what she is going to do next.

Would I recommend this book? Yes definitely. However, it may be worth reading some of the previous books in the series in order to get the full measure of mallory's character.

Jay says

I received this on a giveaway from Putnam, and dived into it immediately. I love the Mallory series and despite this being #11 it did not feel tired, like other mystery series that revolve around one character's eccentricities. The plot line which involves excerpts from a play was unnecessarily over done, but the character development and the action kept it interesting and moving right along. All in all not my favorite of the series, but more than good enough to make me look forward to the next one, maybe where Mallory takes on some personal growth. I recommend you get to know O'Connell's Mallory mysteries. Start with the first, or Stone Angel, one of the best.

Elaine Tomasso says

Ms O'Connell writes absorbing crime novels you don't want to put down and this one is no exception. A playwright is murdered in his seat on the second night of his play, except it's no longer his play as it has been altered beyond recognition. Without issuing spoilers more bodies appear and links to a 10 year old massacre are uncovered and at the centre of it all Mallory pulls the strings in her usual inimitable style. This is a clever, compulsive book and a shining example of great writing. I enthusiastically recommend this as a great read.

Beth says

So I was curious and a little trepidatious about reading this one. I've always been a fan of the Mallory series, but some family members who have also read them didn't like this one at all, and the Goodreads reviews I checked were mixed.

Well, I'm still a fan of the series. I did really like this one. Mallory is a fascinating character, but she is a bit of a construct (as is Charles, for that matter) and her behavior is somewhat predictable. By that I mean we can always count on Mallory to hack, track, manipulate, lock pick and law break her way into solving each case. And you can count on Charles to adore and try to protect her. And you can count on her not only NOT thanking him, but going out of her way to torment him for it. And you can count on him to endlessly forgive her and keep adoring her. Riker, a bit less predictable, can also be counted on to protect Mallory by turning a blind eye when needed, and covering for her when necessary.

So she IS fascinating, but she's also impossible. She has eerie intuition, an haute couture wardrobe, supermodel looks, ninja fighting skills, world class computer hacking ability, a seemingly limitless bank account, and detecting talents that would rival Sherlock Holmes. She's also cold, emotionless, aloof, and often cruel. But here's the interesting thing about this book. Mallory seems almost a sociopath in some books...I pretty much gave up on her character (but not the series) in one book when she was indifferent and unfeeling toward an animal that obviously adored her. That's pretty much how she treats anyone who adores her, and there are many. It makes me crazy. BUT, in this book, she shows a glimmer (just a touch, mind you) of tenderness, towards not just one character but several. Interestingly, those characters are sad, tormented, broken souls; yet, in her way, Mallory takes them under her wing and acts for their benefit.

Speaking of characters, what a splendid cast of characters in this book...literally. The characters are theatre people and what a deliciously crazy, cruel, sick, vulnerable, and self-absorbed troupe they are!

The plot in this one is as intricate and convoluted as always, with the premise being a long ago murder that has been written into the play performed within the book. It's a page turner! There's also a fascinating revelation about the future Mallory and Charles at the end of the book. Good stuff!

Colleen says

I must confess, I came to the Mallory series late, and so read the first nine books in immediate succession. Sadly, that burned me out on the series and I vowed to steer clear of future additions. I picked this book not really realizing that it was part of the series, and boy am I glad I did. This is an excellent mystery story, and one that also adds interesting revelations about Mallory herself and her relationships with those around her. I enjoyed it so much I went back and picked up the book I had missed along the way, happy to once again find myself in Mallory's world. For me at least, these books are best digested a bit at a time- all in one go was just too much and blunted their impact.

A great story, but not a great intro into the series so be sure to read them in order if possible!

Audrey says

I won an ARC from Goodreads. Unfortunately, my library copy came in first so I read that instead.

I've been reading these Mallory books from the beginning. Mallory was one of my favorite mystery characters - strong, brilliant and respected. She had a mysterious background, was much loved, yet displayed sociopathic tendencies. But, she used her powers for good (well, justice in her own mind) and not bad. But, here's the problem that I had with this book and the last one. There has been no character growth or development since Kathy Mallory debuted in 1994 (Mallory's Oracle). The author had a slow but steady pace in releasing these books (fine by me), but her writing and story telling seems to be at a standstill.

Since Mallory's debut, much of her mysterious background has been explored by Mallory herself. She's answered many of her internal questions, what happened to her mother, where was she from, who is her father, etc. But, even with these questions answered, Mallory is the exact same person as she was in 1995.

But the biggest problem is the writing. It started in book #10. O'Connell has the irritating habit of repeating Mallory's characteristics every time one of her friends come in contact with her. Yes, she's beautiful, wears expensive clothes, moves quietly, doesn't feel for others, has a glare, blah blah blah. Once is enough. But, these things pop up in virtually every chapter. Same with Charles' memory, incapable of lying face etc. Or Riker's constant dishevelment. The repetitive nature of the characters is now tiresome. There is also nothing to explain how Mallory builds such loyalty with her father's friends or with new people she meets. Is it just her looks? Because now it seems that everyone is attracted to her constant petulance.

Lastly, the story, while an interesting premise, was pretty choppy. It just didn't hold my attention. I had thought the series had ended a few years ago. That was my impression after finishing the book (maybe #9?). I'm sad to say, it should have stopped then, because these last two books were just huge disappointments.

Laura says

Maybe I need to go back and re-read some of the earlier Mallory novels, because I just don't remember that those books continually hammered home Mallory's more "interesting" tendencies or that she's lacking in empathy, that the squad looks out for her, etc.. It got in the way of the story at times and if you haven't read one before, you'll be very annoyed. I get why this stuff needs to be explained, but once per book is fine. Ditto Charles' eidetic memory or technophobia. Once, then move on.

As for the mystery itself, it was an interesting look backstage and the process of putting on a play, changing the direction/director, etc.. It was never clear to me why anyone paid attention to the ghostwriter's changes, and the copyright issues were a little muddy but that was ok. Bugsy's character was absolutely fascinating; Alma's much less so. Having the new play mimic the plot of the old Nebraska mass killing added an interesting element, but here again there were times when things were rushed.

Only three stars? Had we spent more time on the mystery and less on Mallory's quirks, this would have been a solid four or even a five.

Paula Lyle says

I have read all of these and some are definitely better than others. This one is a beaut. An engrossing mystery with an amazing list of perpetrators. I like it better when no one is explaining how we should feel sorry for Mallory. Mallory just is, she certainly doesn't need my sympathy. And like a true Mallory all the bad guys got their comeuppances. The ending is brilliant!

Monica says

This book was so bad that I couldn't finish it. The characters - all of them, old and new - were grotesque caricatures, and the plot was miles beyond implausible. It is difficult to make the story of multiple murders in a theatrical setting, with extremely(!) dramatis personae, simultaneously confusing and boring, but O'Connell

managed it somehow.

When I remember how much I liked the earlier books in the series, it makes me sad, and a bit angry.

Cheryl Stephens Grimes says

the beginning just didn't catch my interest

Pamela says

This is the 12th addition to Carol O'Connell's Mallory series. When Mallory was first introduced in "Mallory's Oracle" (1995), readers hadn't seen a character quite like the deeply flawed Mallory. Despite her lack of human emotion, there were hints that beneath the sociopathic surface, a human heart beat. However, with "It Happens in the Dark," the latest in the Mallory series, we know that Mallory is just that - a deeply flawed human who is incapable of even the most basic human emotion.

After 18 years, Mallory has gotten darker with few, if any redeeming qualities. "It Happens in the Dark," unfolds at a snail's pace. It is not one of those books that the reader can't put down nor is it a book that the reader is willing to read into the wee hours of the night. It may very well be one of those books that doesn't make it past many people's 50 page rule - you know, I'll read at least 50 pages and if it hasn't grabbed me by page 50, I'm on to the next book in my To Be Read pile.

From start to finish the author relied heavily on the willingness of her fans to continue to read her book long after they would have given up on another author. I stopped reading the series after the third or fourth entry because Mallory was becoming boring. I decided to revisit the series because I was curious about what O'Connell had done with Mallory in the intervening years. The answer to that didn't take long to ascertain - nothing, Mallory was still Mallory.

Diane S ? says

There are so many great mystery and detective series out there, but this is my number one favorite. The one I just can't wait until a new one is written. The Mallory series and Mallory herself, are both unusual, psychologically interesting and well written. I read an interview one time with the author and someone had asked her if she was a sociopath like Mallory, and if she wasn't how she could write about one so well. She had mentioned that she was not but she was very good at getting inside her character's head. It is best to start with the first book in the series, because then one learns what has made Mallory as she is and much of her back story. That is fascinating as well, as are many of the characters that associate or work with Mallory.

This story takes place in the theater, and people in the theater are often times different characters themselves. Many red herrings, many dead ends and always Mallory's unique blend of quick thinking and her original way of garnering justice. This is definitely character driven mysteries, and once again I find myself awaiting the next in series.

ARC from Librarything.

Wilhelmina Jenkins says

I have read this series (The Kathy Mallory mysteries) from the beginning and it was one of my favorites. Sadly, I think that the series should have ended with Find Me, which wrapped up much of the mystery surrounding Mallory's past. The following book, The Chalk Girl, worked because it built on that past. But I'm afraid that the author has run out of things to say about Mallory. This book was very disappointing.
