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Defendant Shelley Malil, left, confers with his defense attorney Steven Meister during a hearing Wednesday in Vista. (Photo by John Raifsnider - For the North County Times)

VISTA: Actor to face trial for attack on ex-girlfriend

By TERI FIGUEROA - Staff Writer

VISTA ---- What began as a quiet Sunday evening in August ---- a little wine, a conversation between old friends ---- turned violent when a jilted lover with a knife showed up and ambushed a woman in her San Marcos home, according to testimony Wednesday.

After listening to witnesses, a Superior Court judge ordered the accused attacker, movie actor Shelley Mathew Malil, to stand trial on a list of charges including attempted murder for the Aug. 10 attack on his on-and-off girlfriend, Kendra Beebe.

Malil, a supporting actor in the hit movie "The 40-Year-Old Virgin," has been jailed since the day after the prolonged and bloody rampage, allegedly fueled by jealousy, left Beebe with life-threatening wounds.

The attempted murder charge carries a potential life sentence because prosecutors allege the attack was premeditated. Authorities contend Malil took a knife from his apartment in Sherman Oaks to Beebe's home.

Malil has pleaded not guilty to attempted murder and not guilty to assault with a deadly weapon in the struggle with Beebe's friend, David Maldonado, during the attack. Maldonado testified that his hands were cut as he and Malil battled for the knife.

Malil also pleaded not guilty to residential burglary. Prosecutor Steve Carver contended that, after Maldonado grabbed the knife and tossed it over a fence, Malil grabbed a large knife from Beebe's kitchen and continued his attack.

The actor was in court for his preliminary hearing, a key proceeding to determine if there is enough evidence for him to face trial. Dressed in a suit and tie, with hair graying at his temples, the 44-year-old Malil appeared to listen carefully to the testimony.

The attack on Beebe was severe, leaving her with 23 stab wounds, including some gouges so deep her lung collapsed, according to Dr. Thomas Velky, the trauma surgeon who operated on her.

Another of the wounds came within an eighth of an inch of her carotid artery, the main artery in her neck.

"Had it hit that artery, she would have likely been dead at the scene," Velky said.

He also said Beebe could have bled to death, simply given the number and severity of the wounds she received in the attack.

Her friend Maldonado said he and Beebe, an old flame, had settled into chairs on her back patio and sipped wine for about 15 minutes when a shirtless man walked into Beebe's backyard. The man leaned in as if to kiss or hug Beebe, he said, and his hands were near Beebe's torso.

Suddenly, Beebe started screaming for Maldonado to call 911, he said.

"She started squirming and yelling for help," Maldonado said.

The man said he fought Malil for control of the knife, then ran to call 911. But since he didn't know the address of the home, he left, driving down the road to find a street sign.

At some point, prosecutors said, Malil grabbed a second knife and continued the attack. Beebe's screams brought neighbors running.

Next-door neighbor Chuck Lee testified that he spotted someone chasing Beebe down the side of her home.

"I knew she was in trouble," Lee said.

He grabbed copper pipes from his garage as makeshift weapons, he said, and ran to Beebe's home. He found her on her front patio, bleeding, with Malil standing over her, taunting her.

"Her chin was almost completely severed off. I could see blood coming out of her neck," he said. "I yelled out to stop, back away and drop the knife."

Beebe did not testify, nor was she in court. However, her friends were there, as were Malil's family members.

Investigator Sandi Sharp, with the district attorney's office, testified that Beebe told her she and Malil had met about a year earlier and had a rocky, off-and-on relationship.

The day before the attack, Sharp said, Malil had argued with Beebe while at a Leucadia beach, and Malil swiped Beebe's car keys and drove off, stranding Beebe.

Sharp also said Beebe said Malil had been possessive and controlling, including badgering her about her clothing choices.

As for the attack, Sharp said, Beebe recalled Malil approaching and coming to either hug or hit her. She said he chased her around the outside of the home, repeatedly stabbing her.

After the hearing, Malil's attorney, Steve Meister, said he was eager to hear Beebe testify at trial.

"The big event is going to be when Kendra Beebe takes the stand," the Los Angeles-based attorney said.

Meister said his client "is holding steady, but this is hard on him."

"He feels bad about what happened," Meister said, "bad for Kendra and her family and bad for his family."

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