

"The Dead Governor" by Stan Smith

Can you solve the mystery?

About nine-thirty in the evening, an agitated Inez Olson showed the police into the study of Robert Cole Kelner. The former governor lay dead on the carpet in a puddle of blood. The papers on his desk showed their normal disorder. The French doors behind the desk were ajar, however, chilling the room.

State Police Detective Liddy Hamilton soon appeared. She questioned Inez, the housekeeper, in her small back bedroom.

"I served Mr. Kelner for thirty years, miss," she said, "and I never had such a shock, finding him lying there. I can't say he was a kind man, but where else could I go?"

"You told the officer that the governor had a visitor this evening," said Hamilton kindly.

"Someone arrived at 7:30, but Mr. Kelner let him in. He had told me someone was coming to talk politics, and he insisted on letting his political visitors in himself. So when I heard the bell I kept on with the dishes. When I finished, I came back to my room to watch TV. About eight I heard the front door close again."

"But you don't know who it was?" asked Hamilton. Inez shook her head. "Go on."

"Shortly after nine," Inez continued, "I made my last round of the house to check locks and lights. The light in the study was on, and a cold draft was coming from under the door. I could feel it on my ankles. I knocked, but got no answer. I opened the door and looked in and..." Inez shuddered.

"The governor had two names jotted on his calendar page for today," Hamilton told her. "Jim Shepard and Samuel Mason. Do you know whether his visitor might have been one of them?"

"I'm sorry, I don't know. The voices from the hall were muffled, and I couldn't hear anything once they went into the study."

Samuel Mason, a state senator, was at home that evening, and Hamilton lost little time calling on him. While they sat in his living room, some music played faintly in an upstairs room.

"Bob murdered?" Mason looked shocked. "That's terrible. I've been home reading all evening, and didn't have the TV or radio on."

"Did you see him today?" asked Hamilton.

"No, but he called me at my office about four. He wanted to mend fences after the spat we've been having."

"What was the spat about?"

"Well, we've been close political allies, but recently he favored another candidate for senate whip. Bob still had a lot of influence and used it."

"So he may have had political enemies." Hamilton smiled. "Was Jim Shepard a political enemy?"

"Possibly," Mason replied. "He's also in the senate, and has feuded with Bob for years."

"Did Kelner mention that he planned to see Shepard today?"

"Not to me, no."

Hamilton was soon at the home of James Shepard. He greeted the detective in his pajamas and bathrobe. As they talked in his living room, he wiped his glasses with a handkerchief.

"I presume you are here about Kelner's murder," he said in a weak voice. "I was horrified to hear the news on TV."

"That's right. I understand you have been at odds with him for years. Your name was on his calendar today. Why was that?"

"No idea. Maybe he tried to call me. The phone rang a few times, but I didn't answer, and left the answering machine off. I wanted to rest."

"Do you know anyone who might harm the governor?"

"I've been racking my brain, but can't help you," said Shepard. "Some might think I did it, but I've been laid out with a stomach flu for the past three days with no end in sight. Haven't left the house except to take the trash to the curb yesterday and pick up the mail. I live alone, you see."

"Have you had any visitors in that time?"

"None. If I come up with anything, I'll call you. Would you be a help and refill my water glass?"

Hamilton refilled the glass at the kitchen sink, noting the pile of mail on the counter. She glanced in the trash bin to confirm Shepard's mention of a trash pickup. The bin contained little but junk mail and empty containers of milk, chili, and soup. Satisfied, she returned to the living room with the water and then departed.

At three the next morning, Hamilton sat upright in bed and dialed the private number of an assistant DA.

"McCoy?" she said. "Sorry, but I need an arrest warrant. I have a suspect in the Kelner case."