

The Shadow of a Death

Devlin put away his phone as he saw the Senator approaching the car. “How was the funeral?” Devlin asked, regretting the question as soon as it left his lips.

“Dreadful. Senator Turner was rather old, I don't know why anyone was surprised at his passing. It got so boring I began checking my text messages. Which reminds me, I received a vaguely threading text from a strange number. Check into that for me.” He handed his phone to Devlin.

The message on the screen said” Grrrrrrrrrr!” Then he saw the number.

“That is Lynn's cell.” Devlin said. “I'll fix your contacts for you.”

“That explains how they got my number, but not what it means.”

“She sent me a similar message. Mine said ‘Sic em’.”

“How is that similar?”

“It's the Baylor equivalent of ‘Hookem Horns’.”

“I still don't understand.”

“I got the reference, but not the context, so I texted her back. She says she just got her acceptance notice from Baylor.”

“That is all very well and good, but no reason to growl at me! Is she going to moo at me if she gets into Texas or bark at me if she gets into Yale?”

“She was very excited about this one. She thinks is the one she is going to choose.”

“Baylor, really? Well, I guess there are worse places she could go.”

“Perhaps I should suggest to the Alumni Association that we make that our new motto.”

The Senator gave him a look he usually reserved for his daughter. “Let's go home, where we can get some work done. I find it very tiring to be unproductive for so long.”

When they arrive back at the mansion, there was a black van and several dark sedans in the driveway. Men in dark suits milled about. One of them approached the limo.

“Agent Reston, FBI,” said the tall man leaning into the limo window Devlin had just rolled down, displaying a badge to verify his statement. “I need to speak with the Senator.”

“What is this about, officer?” Devlin asked, trying to conceal his nervousness. He could not think of any reason to be afraid, but the situation seemed ominous. And he knew ‘officer’ was probably not the correct way to address an FBI agent.

“Can we talk inside. We knocked, but none of your staff responded.”

“There is no staff, just the Senator and me.” The agent had the same quizzical expression everyone had when he said that. “Give me a moment to park the car and I'll let you and your men in.”

Devlin parked the limo and led Agent Reston and an older gentleman in a lighter suit to the Senators office. The Senator, seated behind his desk, said, “How can we help you, Agent Reston.”

“I understand you use the Fresh Goods grocery delivery service. We will need a list of everything they have delivered in the last two months.”

“My man Devlin can get that for you. What is this all about.”

Devlin left to retrieve the list before the agent responded. When he returned with the printout, the Senator was sitting back in his chair staring at his fingers. He was visibly paler than normal.

He handed the list to agent Reston, who said, "I'll get my men working on collecting the evidence." Then agent Reston left the room.

The elderly man in the light suit came to Devlin and took him by the hand and began inspecting his fingernails.

"Looks like you were effected, too. I'll need a urine sample to confirm." He went to his bag and returned with a small plastic jar. As Devlin stood looking at the jar in his hand, the man went back to his bag and retrieve a pair of tweezers and a plastic bag. With no warning, he plucked a sample of hair from Devlin's head. "And a hair sample, as well."

Devlin stood dumbfounded in the middle of the room looking to the Senator for answers.

"The dearly departed Senator Turner did not pass from natural causes, he was poisoned. And so, it seems, were we."

"Wa...what????"

"The young man who delivered our groceries for the past couple of months was not a hard-working immigrant from south of the border, but a scheming terrorist from the Arabian Peninsula doctoring our food with arsenic."

He provided the doctor with the requested sample and assisted the agents in gathering all the groceries that might have been contaminated. He contacted the staff and advised them to get tested, because they had come out to the Senators' for a cook out a few weeks ago. And he notified Mrs. Magnum, as she and Lynn had spent spring break at the mansion.

After the doctor and the FBI left with their collected items, Devlin sat alone in the living room, contemplating the events of the morning, trying to make sense of them. His phone chimed to let him know he had a message.

It was from Lynn. It was a picture of four fingernails. Three were colored with nail polish, the fourth had been scrubbed clean, revealing a perfectly healthy nail underneath. He was relieved by the sight of that healthy nail.

A minute later, he got another message from Lynn. *I've shown you mine, now show me yours*

He took a picture of fingernails, already showing the early signs of arsenic poisoning, and sent it to Lynn. A few minutes later she responded, saying *This is what I'll wear to the funeral*, followed by a picture of her dressed in a simple black dress and an absurdly large brimmed black hat. Her mouth was contorted in a pouty frown.

Sweet Lord, even with a mock sad face, she was unbearably beautiful. Against his better judgement, he saved the picture.

He heard a noise and looked up to see the Senator standing in the kitchen, shoulders slumped facing an empty cabinet.

"Dammit, they took my Cocoa Puffs."