

Death in the Office

Written by Tom Fowler (abridged), source: www.5minutemystery.com

It was 8:35 A.M. and Cynthia Peck was not only in a bad mood but late for work as well, which was most unusual for her. Not only was she late, but it had been raining hard since 7:13. She knew it was 7:13 because that is what the digital clock in her car reflected as the first thick raindrops splattered her **windshield**¹. As she entered the Ames building, she **cursed**² silently that her oversized umbrella had done a poor job of keeping her dry.

Cynthia Peck was 37 years old and a vice president of the Ames Marketing Company. She did not become a company vice president by being weak or **faint hearted**³. She knew something was wrong as she **exited**⁴ the sixth floor elevator and met several uniformed police officers waiting for her to arrive. Before the officers had a chance to say anything to her, she asked, “What is going on?”

Detective Sergeant Kyle Whitmore answered, “Are you Cynthia Peck?”

“Yes,” she replied and asked again, “What’s going on?”

“There is a dead man in your office. Your assistant, Ms. Brewer, found him this morning. Identification in his wallet shows him to be Mr. Trent Willis. Do you know him?”

Cynthia showed no emotion as she answered, “Yes, we had a meeting in my office scheduled for this morning. What happened?”

“He was murdered,” the detective answered, watching Cynthia carefully, and added, “he has a letter opener in his chest. The only **belongings**⁵ we found were his cell phone and briefcase.” The detective did not share with her the fact that the state of her office **indicated**⁶ the powerfully built Trent Willis, whose driver’s license showed him to be 35 years old, had a violent but **futile**⁷ fight with his attacker.

Cynthia now felt slightly **dizzy**⁸. Small beads of sweat broke out upon her high forehead as she asked, without visible emotion, “Who did it?”

“We don’t know yet,” Sergeant Whitmore answered, noticing the wetness on Cynthia’s clothing. He pointed towards the end of the hall and said, “Please join us in the conference room after taking a moment to dry off.”

“Thank you,” she gratefully replied. When she entered the conference room, Cynthia saw that her assistant, Megan Brewer, was already seated along with her boss, company president Steve Ledbetter and a member of her marketing team, Josh Kesler. She quickly took a seat.

Sergeant Whitmore silently noted to himself that the Ames employees, with the exception of Steve Ledbetter, appeared to be between 35-40 years old and in good physical condition. President Ledbetter was the exception, being 58 years old and at least 50 pounds overweight.

He began to speak, “Ms. Brewer found the victim at 7:51 this morning. Mr. Willis, as you know, Ms. Peck, had an 8:15 appointment to see you. Ms. Brewer claims not to know how he got to the sixth floor and into the office. I know that I do not need to tell you that the stairways are locked and a pass code is needed to **exit**⁴ the elevator on the sixth floor. Now, Ms. Peck and Ms. Brewer are the only persons with a passkey into Ms. Peck’s office, but Ms. Brewer informs us that she left her passkey on her outer office desk for a few moments while in the **breakroom**⁹ getting a cup of coffee. Security tells us that four persons accessed the sixth floor before 7:51.” Whitmore stopped for a moment to catch his breath and then added, “And those persons are all of you. Before anyone asks, records show Ms. Peck **exited**⁴ the elevator at 6:45, a little over an hour before Mr.

Trent was discovered.”

“It’s true, Sergeant. Stupidly, I left the signed contract I was to give to Mr. Willis at home. I had to return home and get it.”

The sergeant looked at Cynthia and said, “OK, for now. What security shows is that Ms. Peck arrived at 6:45, and Ms. Brewer was next at 6:59. At 7:25, Mr. Kesler arrived. Mr. Ledbetter was last to arrive at 7:40.” Sgt. Whitmore paused and looked at each of them **in turn**¹⁰ before adding, “It’s highly **unlikely**¹¹ that somebody hid overnight on the sixth floor, but we’re checking security cameras as I speak. What is much more **likely**¹¹ is that one of you murdered Trent Willis.”

Megan felt **faint**¹² and began to **weep**¹³. Softly, Sgt. Whitmore said to her, “I’m sorry, Ms. Brewer, this is unpleasant but necessary.

Steve Ledbetter asked, “Why not check the cameras to see when Mr. Willis entered?”

“Because lightning knocked them out early this morning, before the rains hit,” was the sergeant’s reply. Turning to Cynthia, he said, “Let’s begin with you, Ms. Peck. You first arrived at 6:45. Did you enter your office?”

“Yes. It was then that I discovered that I left the contract at home. I left to get it.”

“Security shows you left the sixth floor at 6:49,” Whitmore said,

“That’s right,” Cynthia answered.

“So it took you an hour and 46 minutes to get back here?” Whitmore asked.

“Right again. The rain hit at 7:13 by my car radio and there was a traffic jam. I was in my car the entire time, except for the short time I was in my apartment looking for the contract.” Cynthia thought for a moment then added, “I made several cell phone calls from my car, one of them around 7:10 to the newspaper delivery service, one to my husband’s office around 7:35 and another just after 8:00 to my doctor’s office. Telephone company records will show my cell phone to be a long way from here between shortly after leaving until after 8:15 or so.” As she said this, she handed Sgt. Whitmore her cell phone.

Whitmore thanked her and turned to Cynthia’s assistant, Megan Brewer, who had calmed down. He stated, “You **exited**⁴ the elevator at 6:59. Did you notice anything out of the ordinary when you arrived?”

“Nothing. I noticed the lightning outside the windows but that is all.”

Thinking for a moment, he asked, “Did Ms. Peck call you at anytime after leaving to return home?”

“No, but that is not unusual. She only calls when she needs to. This morning, she sent an email before leaving, explaining the situation and asking me to make Mr. Willis comfortable.”

Whitmore turned to Josh Kesler and asked, “What about you? You got here at 7:25. Did you see or hear anything out of the ordinary?”

“No,” was his response.

Did you make any calls on your cell phone or from the office; anything that can prove you are not the killer?”

Nervously, Josh replied, “No, nothing.”

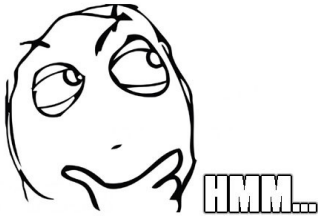
Whitmore thought for a long moment, and then asked Steve Ledbetter. “Do you have a raincoat?”

“Yes, but I do not have it with me. As president of the company, I have a car and driver **at my disposal**¹⁴. Maurice always lets me out right at the front door so I never wear a coat.”

Turning back to Josh Kesler, “And you? Do you have a raincoat?”

Josh was **puzzled**¹⁵ but answered, “No, but I have an umbrella. If you want to see it, it’s drying in my office.”

Sergeant Whitmore had seen a lot in his 12 years as a **homicide**¹⁶ investigator, but never anything as strange as this. Pointing to the murderer, he said to the officer guarding the door, “Arrest this person for second degree murder.”



**Now what do YOU think? Who did Sergeant Whitmore point to?
Who is responsible for Trent Willis's death?**

Go to solution: <http://www.jsmundo.cz/solution-to-death-in-the-office-level-b2/>

GLOSSARY you may find helpful

¹**windshield (AmE), windscreen (BrE);** meaning: the window at the front of a truck, car, etc. (čelní sklo)

²**curse;** klít, nadávat, proklínat

³**faint-hearted = cowardly, fearful;** meaning: not confident or brave, someone who dislikes unnecessary risks (bázlivý, zbabělý)

⁴**exit = leave, depart, go out, get out** (odejít, vyjít, opustit)

⁵**belongings = possessions, things;** meaning: the things that a person owns, especially those that can be carried (osobní věci, majetek)

⁶**indicate = signal, point;** meaning: to show, point, or make clear in another way (naznačovat, ukazovat (nepřímo), indikovat)

⁷**futile = pointless, unimportant, useless;** meaning: producing no result or effect (zbytečný, marný)

⁸**dizzy;** meaning: feeling as if everything is turning around, and that you are not able to balance and may fall down (mající závrat'; I feel dizzy = točí se mi hlava, mám závrat')

⁹**breakroom = lunchroom;** meaning: a room at a company used to have coffee, breaks, snacks, lunches, etc. in (kuchyňka (pro zaměstnance ve firmách))

¹⁰**in turn;** jeden po druhém, postupně

¹¹**likely = probable; unlikely = improbable**

¹²**faint = weak and unwell;** slabý, malátný, cítící se na omdlení

¹³**weep = cry;** ronit slzy, brečet, plakat

¹⁴**at sb's disposal;** meaning: available to be used by someone (k dispozici)

¹⁵**puzzled = confused;** meaning: unable to think clearly or to understand something (zmatený)

¹⁶**homicide = murder, killing, manslaughter;** zabití, usmrcení, vražda