

## What Others are Saying about "A Deadly Suggestion"

"Once I started, I couldn't put it down. It had a lot of interesting twists and turns that kept me on the edge of my seat for half the night. I finished the book the next day. I absolutely loved it! It's one of my favorite books now. I can't wait until she writes another!"

-- P. Koehler, Fountain Valley, CA

"I have read 'Deadly...' Oh, yes, it is deadly. I am a lover of mysteries and murders and this one really takes you to it all. It is so well written you can actually visualize the personalities, the scenarios. It is a *grand* read. I am sorry it ended. I really tried to read it slower so the book would last longer. I just could not put it down. Loved it and cannot wait for the next one!!!"

-- L. Tanons, Blaine, WA

"This book has the potential to be a bestseller & Robin has the trademark of being a bestselling author. Starting from the prologue, the book hooked me in like a fish on a line. It kept me guessing to the very end. Just when I thought I knew who the killer was, she throws in another twist. I was reading this book everywhere I went. I would certainly recommend this book to all my friends. In retrospect, it was like reading a Dan Brown novel. I have not seen that many twists and turns since "Da Vinci Code". Thank you for letting me read your novel. It was really well thought out.

-- A. Chan, Vancouver, Canada

# **A DEADLY SUGGESTION**

**R.W. Williams**

**Smashwords Edition**

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Thank you for respecting the hard work of this author.

## **Dedication**

If anyone thinks that dedication of a book is just a perfunctory chore for the author, it really isn't. Without the support and understanding of family and friends, obviously my first book, "A Deadly Suggestion," couldn't have come about. With my starts and stops on its writing came discussions of finding an editor, finding readers to give it a proper review, and my splashing of my proposed book cover on their computer screen through the internet, just to see if they thought it carried a *come hither if you dare* message. Even the dog got into the act, poking her nose under my hand and flipping it off the keyboard, telling me it was time to go play instead of type. Now that's one smart pooch.

So with all my heartfelt love and thanks I dedicate this book to all those who said, "You're kidding," when I told them I was writing a murder mystery thriller, my family and friends who said, "I want to read it," and then gave it their stamp of approval, and to all those readers who found my writing grabbed them by the throat and didn't let go until they'd finished the book. They can now exhale!

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## Prologue

That's all! *I've had it!* Get out and take your cheating and your twisted mind with you!"

From the level of extreme rage Kathryn suddenly clenched her teeth and lowered her voice to a hissing whisper. Her final words oozed ominous. He froze. If he moved, a rustling of his windbreaker might wipe out her parting comment. "Stay on this train and hell is your next stop." Besides his cheating, she knew he was attempting to do *something* terribly wrong. His questions all the time, they were dark in their intent. He was using her.

He knew. It was *over!* He remembered her rage the first time she caught him cheating. The sparkle of their early years slowly washed away. It was like a broken vase, glued back together but the cracks always showed. But this time! This time she raged at more than just his cheating. The shattering of their marriage was with such force its pieces were now nothing but small shards of dust; nothing left to glue. He turned and headed out the door taking nothing with him but his computer. To him the rest was unimportant. His only frustration was her unwillingness to feed him any further information for his research, his *groundbreaking* research! He was sure she didn't know what he was up to. As he made a beeline to his car he told himself she wasn't necessary. His work was almost complete. He could figure out the rest by himself. And if she did suddenly realize his goal, he assured himself she knew not to get in his way!

As she heard his car door slam and the engine start, she ran to the bathroom and threw up. Her head was spinning. What kind of monster had he become?



## Chapter 1 (The Scene)

The scene was all too familiar. Vehicle upside down, smoke from a smoldering but suppressed fire still visible, the coroner's vehicle on scene. It told a great deal to anyone driving by. Someone was dead.

“What do we have, Carver,” Lieutenant Trotman from the State Patrol's Crime Investigation Division asked through his window as he pulled up. He parked in the grassy median of Interstate 5. Red emergency lights and the Crime Scene Response Team were already on site. The heavy rain continued to fall off and on as it had throughout the night, and winds remained gusty. An accident like the one in front of him wasn't uncommon. A sleepy occupant or too much speed and a heavy shove from the wind on rain slicked roads, it so often lead to someone's demise. But tonight—tonight the appearance of a possible crime scene made the difference.

“We have a rollover, what looks to be a Ford Explorer, looks like one vic, and they're crisp. And we need to talk to Captain Wilkerson from Fire. We're heading for a long night. His crew is crying foul.”

Lieutenant John Trotman showed no reaction. Nothing surprised him after 33 years. The Department was his whole life. The last half of his career was spent investigating crime scenes as part of the State Patrol's Crime Investigation Division.

The detectives were called upon because Captain Wilkerson's firemen let him know they smelled a crime scene and requested further investigation. The pattern of the burn and a shaking young flight attendant's tearful description brought the rollover into question.

The only witness to the accident, she arrived to see a blazing car on its roof with the driver's side interior engulfed in flames. Now sitting in a Medic One unit, her mind was wrapped around her hysterical call to 9-1-1 for help and the interminable wait. The memory of the victim's last moments lashed at her. She still saw the woman screaming and clawing at the glass. At one-twenty in the morning few cars were on the I-5 to witness the horror she saw unfold. Her mind replayed and replayed the scene. She did not dare close her eyes. The memory of what happened was too graphic.

"Captain Wilkerson? C.I.D. I'm Detective Trotman, and this is Detective Carver."

The fire captain was short on words. "I think this is an inside job." Trotman looked with a frown at the Ford Explorer and then back to the captain. "The burn pattern inside the car indicates the use of an accelerant. The bad part is between us and the fire; external clues are few and far between. But if my antennae are picking up the signals I think they are, the evidence is on the inside. It's going to take a lot of ash sifting to figure this one out, but my gut tells me this needs some serious follow-up."

When cars are ablaze in the center divider, the last concern of firefighters is preserving clues. Most single vehicle rollovers are accidental, and rescue personnel don't tiptoe around evidence in a possible crime scene when a victim or others are in danger.

Trotman was intrigued. "That means someone rolled it, hosed it down and likely lit it to hide something or kill a witness, a-- a girlfriend who knows too much or" . . . His voice trailed off as he pondered the reasons for such an act.

Wilkerson shook his head. "Well, that's a possible scenario. But if they did, they were in it when it rolled, spread the accelerant, lit the fire and then made like Houdini and got out through hot metal, not a window. The car's roll crush makes the inability to open a door or

window a sure thing. And finding even a partial window opening big enough to climb out? That's a no go.

“And at the time your witness gets here, the car is already on its roof and someone is in the front seat screaming and on fire. That's what's so weird. The car is burning in the front seat with the victim inside. Neither the engine nor the gas tank is involved, yet the victim and her side of the car are cooking. The start of the fire is strictly inside only and limited to one corner of the interior at first. But the roll leaves the car crushed enough that your witness can't get the doors open to save the victim. Then not but a minute later she can't get near the car. The inside is fully involved and the fire has worked its way outside. With the victim obviously gone by now, the witness can only call for help and wait for us.”

Carver jumped in next. “So what's your take on how someone could pull this off?”

Wilkerson chuckled through his first words. “I don't have one; just a certainty this is arson and it's resulted in a death. That's why we invited you boys to the party. CSRT will be busy for a while with this one!”

Carver knew the Crime Scene Response Team's partnership with the Crime Laboratory Division and the Criminal Investigation Division of The Washington State Patrol would keep all three agencies coordinating efforts on what on first blush had him mulling the scenario that might fit this crime.

Wilkerson continued, “Patrol handed your witness off to Medics and they have her tucked in the back of their unit. She's pretty shocky.”

The detectives knew all too well that even the most seasoned Department veteran couldn't listen to someone screaming and see them incinerate before their eyes, and then dust themselves off and go on about their business.

Carver nodded and said he'd go check on her, knowing a close-behind Trotman would soon want to start questioning. "What's her name?"

"Lucinda Neely. She works for Alaska Airlines as a stewardess and she was heading home from SeaTac when the accident happened. She lives in Bellingham. Her husband is on his way."

Stewardess! Detective Sam Carver under normal circumstances would have corrected Captain Wilkerson. With his own sister a 20-year veteran as a flight attendant, he learned long ago "stewardess" was a dirty word. But his lighthearted correction to someone else under different circumstances would have to go unspoken tonight.

Once a Washington State Trooper before his promotion, Carver looked like a tank coming at you when he approached. A leftover vestige from his college football days, his 260-pound 6'3" frame intimidated anyone who had business with him, *if* they were on the wrong side of a case. But his effect on distraught women after only a few sentences was always more like a giant teddy bear. "I'll head on over to see the witness." With that, Carver excused himself.

Pondering and oblivious to the charred victim still in the car, Trotman walked around the burned out vehicle which was still upside down and jammed against a cable in the center of the median. Then he headed over to question the witness. Lucinda Neely was a stunning brunette with shoulder length hair and a perfect manicure. She was still in her uniform but for the tennis shoes she slipped on just after landing. The trek to the crew bus was a long haul to begin with, but walking to her car in the outlying employee parking lot in her work shoes was all but impossible.

Her day had been miserable. Environmentalists surely blamed Global Warming for what they viewed as an unusual weather pattern, but pilots viewed the weather as just another typical

summer storm with heavy turbulence. The ratty weather of the last four days had harassed them all the way to Seattle. All week long pilots reported wicked west southwest headwinds in most areas of the U.S., strong winds aloft, up and downdrafts buffeting their planes to and fro.

Lucinda Neely's flight was no different. The headwinds slowed their flight to a crawl. And relief wasn't found with flight level change either, which left the jet to flop about in the sky throughout much of the trip. The weather's severity forced the flight attendants to cancel the expected trips down the aisle with the drink cart and the obligatory miniscule peanut bags.

That day she was the "A" flight attendant in first class on board one of Alaska Airline's Boeing 737-700s that took off from Dallas-Fort Worth. But before they could continue on their way to SeaTac Airport in Seattle, the need for immediate medical attention for a heart attack victim up front forced an unplanned landing in Denver. A doctor on board rendered assistance and the crew utilized Med Link, a direct line to emergency physicians on the ground, but there was nothing more the passenger-physician could do. The victim didn't survive long enough for the pilots to get their plane on the ground. Yes, for Lucinda this had been a *very* long day!

In the Medic One van her statement to Trotman and Carver was brief. She struggled to speak through the obvious shock which racked her both mentally and physically. She sat on the gurney in the aid truck, her feet and legs pressed together firmly, her shoulders hunched forward with her arms crossed tightly as if chilled to the bone. She was wrapped in a blanket by the Medic to help stave off the shivers which consumed her.

After Trotman introduced himself his questions led her into the night's tragedy. Her answers painted a picture that would hold her mind in its grip for weeks to come. She thought maybe she had seen a set of taillights up ahead cut suddenly to the left. It looked like something was wrong, but through the driving rain, even with the windshield wipers on high; it was hard to

be sure what she had seen. It was quite a distance ahead. But then mere seconds later she caught up to the errant vehicle on its roof with the driver's door up against the cable barrier and the fire mostly on the driver's side at first.

Detective Carver remembered the accidents of long ago before the cable system was in place. Through the years too many one and two-car accidents had occurred with out-of-control cars propelled into oncoming traffic through the grassy median in the center of the freeway. Deadly head-on collisions or single car rollovers were the result all too often. After research proved its effectiveness, the Cable Median Safety Barrier was installed by the State to stop just such scenarios. It wasn't a perfect system, but its statewide 95 percent success rate was proof positive it was a wise decision.

Due to the unusual number of cross-over accidents that still managed to occur through the Marysville stretch, though, the cable barrier had to be doubled. Then in February of 2007 an SUV ripped through both cable systems in the stretch between Arlington and Marysville and slammed into a bus. The SUV driver died and Washington's Governor Gregoire ordered an immediate study of what the issues were and what could be done. In July of 2007 the recommendation was returned. Put in concrete barriers through that 10-mile stretch. But in victim Beth Langley's case, whether double cable systems or the eventual installation of a concrete barrier in the future, neither mattered. She was already dead.

Detective Carver felt for Lucinda as she haltingly described the accident. Her facial expression never changed, frozen in numbness now from the horror she saw. She stared at the floor of the medic unit as she spoke, her eyes locked on one spot. She rarely blinked. Her lips hardly moved as she answered each question in a barely audible voice. She was telling about the final moments of the accident when a trooper briefly stuck his head in to let the medic know her

husband had arrived and was waiting outside. They had earlier asked her who they could contact for her. She was in no shape to drive home.

Trotman pushed through the last two questions and stopped. He was confident he had enough information for now. Though her facial expression was that of a blank wall, her mind held her hostage in the last moment, that moment when it all unfolded, a moment that would continue to replay itself for weeks to come, months, maybe years. She needed emotional support now that only her husband could provide.

Trotman and Carver stepped out of the medic unit in the wee hours of the morning. Lucinda's answers had yielded the difficult-to-tell scenario. The roof was caved in heavily on the passenger side and prevented any escape or rescue by a passerby. The windows that were still in tact and not crushed were on the driver's side, jammed tightly against the Cable Median Safety Barrier. When she crossed the cables she could see someone inside. She had run over to the car hoping to help the victim, but the median cable secured the driver's door in place and trapped the woman. She heard the victim's screams and saw her hanging upside down while she banged her fists on the driver's side window, a terrifying scene that seemed to play out over minutes, when in fact it was merely seconds. Then there was silence as the woman inside stopped screaming while choking on the smoke and was finally claimed by the flames. A loud kawahump followed and the whole car was engulfed inside and out. No, Lucinda didn't see anyone running away. Yes, she could smell gas, she thought.

The accident investigation team arrived and 4:30 AM showed the early morning light. July's long summer days allowed CSRT to get well into their work before traffic got heavy. Photographs of the victim, the position of the car, skid marks, torn up grass in the center divider, it all had to be compiled before the victim could be removed and the car hauled away.



## Chapter 2 (Best Friends Forever)

As she waited for her best friend to arrive, Stacy Turner was stretched out on her couch in her pajamas. After her friend Beth's call at 1 AM, she started to watch an old movie to stay awake until her friend's arrival, but she nodded off instead. When she awoke and realized her friend was a no-show, Stacy's concern grew into fear. Beth's call put her on alert that her friend needed a place to stay and a friendly shoulder to cry on. But three hours later a quick trip of only 15 minutes produced no further phone calls and no best friend. Someone Stacy loved like a sister was missing.

The prior day Beth told Stacy her deepest secrets. She spilled forth about her poor choice of a boyfriend; his temper, his drinking, his attachment to internet porn, his Jekyll and Hyde personality. The man of two years ago was gone. He wasn't even the same man of six months ago. She told secrets she'd been holding in for months.

Stacy flashed back to Beth's thrill when she first met *Mr. Right*. Back then the two women shared their secrets as usual, but fun secrets. Neither of them groused about their men. In fact, Beth just about floated when she talked about *her* guy! He always came across as the perfect gentleman. That's why she moved in with him so quickly. She described him as her "prince." But in the last six months their two-year relationship showed more and more rough edges and Geoff exhibited a darker side. What a change! In the beginning Geoffrey Ghio dazzled Beth; by night a country & western fan complete with boots, big belt buckle and a cowboy hat when out doing the town, and by day a mechanic. A wounded veteran of the Marines, America considered him one of its war heroes.

Stacy snapped back to reality. Beth was missing! She felt anxious enough to call Geoff's apartment, like him or not. But when he answered and sounded shocked at Beth's failure to arrive at Stacy's, alarm bells sounded for both of them. She was convinced he'd done something to her friend. Geoff wanted to call the hospitals. He knew Beth when she was upset. She hightailed it to Stacy's every single time.

Stacy was sure Geoff had done something bad, and she knew the motive for Geoff's actions, the reason for Beth's disappearance. Less than twenty-four hours earlier Stacy had been a shoulder for Beth to cry on. Beth confided about her pregnancy and how terrified she was to tell Geoff. Obviously she must have told him and somehow he took care of the situation. Stacy called 9-1-1.

### Chapter 3 (Poor Sap)

The commute was grueling this morning. Max Torkleson had no idea what was up ahead, but assumed someone's "stupid attack" knotted up the I-5. Any more he hated the occasional morning drive from his home in Mount Vernon to downtown Seattle. It never failed to take over an hour, yet the weekends produced a mere 45-minute trip.

As Max's car crawled along in traffic, the radio made only short mention to commuters of the early morning fatality involving a Ford Explorer on the I-5 in Marysville. The identity of the sole victim was as yet unavailable, which was standard right after any accident.

"Poor sap. What a crappy way to go. Probably fell asleep at the wheel." Max made audible commentaries to himself about the news. Talk radio, news, things he saw, drivers that pissed him off, he had something to say about everything, with or without an audience. And if no comment spewed forth about what he saw, sensed or heard, his tape recorder was up to his mouth. Max recorded his agenda for the day or follow-up thoughts for one of his cases. He never took notes when investigating something. He taped every thought. Then his secretary/daughter typed it all up later. Barbara was his right-hand ma'am when it came to office duties, and an excellent sounding board for his ideas.

Retired after 35 years with the State Troopers and C.I.D and now a freelance investigator, Max was still addicted to the thrill. Though he was a bit of an odd duck, he really knew his stuff. He had a keen sense for thinking outside the box, *way* outside the box. Though he was often hired to consult when cases baffled the pros at C.I.D., he also testified in court in

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