

AUTHOR OF *BULLET IN THE NIGHT* AND *NEVER TOMORROW*

# JUDITH ROLFS

INTRIGUE LACED WITH MURDER PROPELS THIS NOVEL  
TO THE PINNACLE OF SUSPENSE...

Pat Gussin, *New York Times* Best Selling Author of *After the Fall*,  
on *Never Tomorrow*

THE



WINDEMERE  
AFFAIR

HER PATIENT IS DEAD  
IF IT WAS SUICIDE, WHY IS SOMEONE TRYING TO KILL HER?

# The Windemere Affair

Judith Rolfs

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

**The Windemere Affair**  
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*Dedication*

To my sister Joy and my brother Jim – love you  
forever.





# Prologue

Morning mist scented with pine and wet grass coated Albert Windemere's golf cart. He tightened his grip on the wheel as he passed the green on Pine Willow Course. The pin placement on the back edge would make for a tricky putt to be sure. Funny, the things you notice at a time like this.

He inhaled deep and slow, feeling the warmth of the orange-gold sun escaping the horizon. Huge oaks, spectators to twenty seasons of golfers, stretched their shadows across the fairway. Albert patted his pocket, congratulating himself on his precise preparation.

The luminous dial of his watch read 5:40 AM. He had at least twenty minutes before the course swung into motion. By then everything would be over. Now that it was time, a sense of joy slid over him. He pressed his foot to the pedal for the cart's uphill climb and then turned off the paved path to enter the woods behind the fifth green. A squirrel, disturbed on its breakfast quest, chattered noisily and darted away.

The gunshot at five fifty, silent and precise, didn't even disturb the sparrows' morning song.

# 1

Most days I love being psychotherapist Dr. Jennifer Trevor, wife to my husband, Nick, who makes me laugh almost daily, and mother to three spirited and delightful children. Yes, I'm totally prejudiced.

I was forced out of my job at the Fullness of Life Center over the Directive Ninety-Nine horror. I feared I'd never work again, but the publicity actually improved my reputation instead of destroying it. Go figure. Five months later, I opened my private practice in downtown Lake Geneva, the perky resort city halfway between Milwaukee and Chicago, and I've not lacked for clients since.

Counseling individuals is like hunting, searching for what's out of sync in their lives and guiding them along a path of change. Some resist progress, which can be frustrating, but I've never had a client I didn't find fascinating.

Lately, however, listening to the chaos of dysfunctional lives has been draining my own serenity. By bedtime I'm a shriveled balloon and even seven hours of sleep isn't enough to inflate me again.

Last night I awoke from a 2:00 AM nightmare with clenched fists and admitted I needed a vacation. Plus, the "togetherness tank" with my equally busy lawyer husband needed a refill.

Europeans take a six-week summer holiday. Surely, I could manage seven days in August with my



husband to keep sweet peace in my psyche. I teach clients the value of playtime. Now I'd model it.

Fortunately, Nick was between cases at his legal firm and could disappear with me for a week.

Our teens, Collin and Tara; and our eight-year-old, Jenny, squealed with joy when we proposed an extended visit without us to Nick's parents in Arizona. So much for missing mama! I was OK with their excitement because vacation memories with sixty-something grandparents riding horses and hiking mountain paths would be priceless.

I'd have preferred a week in Hawaii or Mexico, but it wasn't in the budget. Plus, I feared Nick and I would succumb to our usual travel mania, which has happened more times than I care to recount. I'm a sightseeing addict. Out west with the children last summer, we didn't miss a single tourist attraction and returned home more exhausted than we'd been on our day of departure.

The arrangements fell into place with amazing speed. God is in this, I reassured myself.

Nick did a quick online search and read me the description of Pine Willow Resort in Wisconsin Dells: "A secluded four-hundred-acre retreat, twenty-seven-hole championship golf course, tennis, two pools, stables, and a four-star restaurant."

I clapped my hands. "Best of all it's only two-and-a-half hours away. Why waste a day on each end of our week in planes and airports when we can ride straight to our destination in our temperature-controlled box on wheels?"

Nick grinned. "Not to mention arriving on the golf course before noon." Four days later, Nick drove the children to Mitchell Airport in Milwaukee while I took

our sad-eyed chocolate lab to the vet and returned home to pack.

I braced myself for Nick's usual moans while he loaded clothes, snacks, and sports equipment into the car. He didn't disappoint me.

"All this for a short trip? We're not moving, you know."

I squeezed the muscle in his forearm. "Packing light has never been my forte. Besides I'm keeping your heart healthy with weightlifting."

"Or setting off the big one prematurely."

"Hey, the golf clubs and tennis rackets are essential."

He grimaced and finished loading.

I set my reading book bag on the floor of the passenger seat next to my purse and hopped in.

Nick prayed as we pulled out. "God send angels to guard our children and home during our absence."

"Amen." I rested my hand on his shoulder. "Pine Willow here we come. A week of bliss and rest."

## 2

The first few days of our getaway were delightful. Our next-to-last afternoon, I noticed a sudden buzz of whispering among the restaurant staff.

I turned to see our sweet, talkative waitress who wore a large gold "LINDA" pin above her heart, nose-to-nose in animated conversation with another server whose black ponytail bobbed from side to side as she repeated, "No way."

I leaned closer, straining my ears, and overheard the words *gun* and *man's been shot*.

Noticing my stare, Linda picked up a coffeepot from the warming stand and headed toward me. I waited all of two seconds to quiz her.

She spewed her commentary like a news report in fragments. "Yep, you heard right. Man's been found dead on Pine Willow Golf Course. Shot." She paused to take a breath. "In the woods behind the fifth hole. Police shut down nine holes for now. Somebody named Al Wind, Windman, no Windemere. That's it."

I pressed my hand across my mouth.

"Yeah, ain't it awful?" Linda lowered her voice, eyes bulging. "He and his wife rented a villa at the resort...maybe I shouldn't be telling you this. Sure don't want people getting scared and leaving." She looked around.

The manager was nowhere in sight.

"Something else."

"What?" Nick and I asked in unison.

"Rumor is the bullet was self-whatchamacallit."

Linda turned up her nose.

"Self-inflicted?"

"Yeah, that's it. No one heard the shot. Musta been a silencer on the gun. I seen these on TV shows a lot." She looked toward the kitchen. "Excuse me. I got an order up."

Nick reached for my hand "Honey, you're white. Are you OK?"

"This is awful."

"You knew him?"

I took a sip of water to stem sudden nausea and drew a deep breath. "I...I can't say."

"OK. You don't have to. It's written on your face. I assume he was a client, or you'd tell. I'm so sorry." Nick covered my hand with his.

My man reads me well.

"Actually," Nick continued, "I've heard of Albert Windemere by name and reputation. We were never formally introduced."

Linda returned a few minutes later to collect our plates. Before she could whip off I asked, "Are you certain you heard Mr. Windemere shot himself?"

"I think so. Did himself in. Not as horrid as a murder at least. But dead is dead. That's what counts."

I sat speechless, watching Linda sweep up our plates and stack them on her left arm. She turned and race-walked to the kitchen.

I met Nick's gaze. "You bet how someone dies matters. Guilt from suicide can torment family and friends. I've worked with enough clients through the painful self-examination that follows. They assume somehow they had the power to stop the event but

failed.”

Nick ran his palm across his forehead. “How sad to believe you have nothing to live for. I can only imagine what total despair he experienced to kill himself.”

“I refuse to believe it. Al was thrilled with his life,” I whispered to Nick. “These rumors make me angry. He wouldn’t kill himself. Never.”

Nick squeezed my hand before pouring more cream in his coffee. “Sweetheart, nobody can be sure about suicide.”

I flinched and set my cup down with a clatter. “Subtle life stressors that a psychotherapist observe are often a signal. With Al it was quite the opposite. He radiated emotional and spiritual health.”

“If you’re so sure he wouldn’t kill himself, who’d want him dead?”

I shrugged. “It’s true he had some problems. Privacy issues prevent me from discussing them. His life wasn’t perfect by a stretch, but with his new attitude he could cope with ups and downs. Anxiety rose in my voice, and I bit my lip. “He had plenty of enemies.”

“Windemere co-owned American Realty, a huge firm in the industry.” Nick stroked his chin. “With a reputation for being on the shaky side ethically. I’ve had two clients suffer major losses from bad investments. Rumor is he was an unsavory character, a bit on the wild side.”

Linda appeared with our bill, cutting off my reply. “No hurry, I’ll take this when you’re ready.” She refilled our waters and trotted off to dispense warm-ups and gossip to adjoining tables.

I opened my makeup bag and applied gloss to my

dry lips, debating my next words. I'd never breach confidentiality. Common knowledge I could reveal. "Al was rebuilding his reputation."

"Good for him." Nick raised his eyebrows. "Was he married?"

No harm saying, it would be in the newspaper obit. "His wife, Rose, is a sweetheart. Before her health problem, she used to do amateur theater and some playwriting—a talented gal."

Nick glanced at his watch. "We tee off in less than an hour even if it is only going to be nine holes. You're obviously upset. Would you prefer I cancel?"

I forced a smile. "Al's death is disturbing for sure, but there's nothing I can do now. This is still our vacation after all. I'll catch up with you on the practice range in half an hour. I left my cell phone in our room and want to check messages." I grimaced. "I need assurance the rest of our world is intact."

Nick stood and gave me a hug. "OK, meet me on the putting green."

I strolled back to our room past burgeoning flowerbeds, unable to shake the image of a bullet exploding in Al's body. I'd spoken to him by phone only a week ago. Now I'd never hear his voice again on earth. A tear slid down my cheek. I prayed silently for the soul of this dear man and paused to stroke the petal of a sunflower.

How brief, beautiful, and fragile life is.

### 3

The Pine Willow lobby resembled an indoor forest. A stone-rimmed pool collected water from a continuous, fifteen-foot waterfall. Lacy ferns, ivy, and other greenery accented plump beige sofas.

I whisked past the two clerks chatting at the empty reception counter. A strong scent of chlorine wafted from the indoor swimming pool and made me wince. No shiny silver elevator for me. I took the stairs to the third floor to release my pent-up energy.

Sticking my key card in the slot, I waited impatiently for the green flash to enter. The maid had already been to our room, freshened the towels, and made the bed; but otherwise, everything was exactly as I'd left it, which seemed impossible. When someone you know dies, shouldn't the world look different?

The light blue walls held gilt-framed pictures of sailboats on peaceful seas. Peace? Mine had evaporated. The yellow and white floral bedspreads brightened my spirit a bit. Beauty, order, and harmony do this for me.

I grabbed my phone from the charger and pressed messages. A solid knock sounded on the door, followed by the word "Police."

My blood pressure raced as I opened to a man holding a police ID in his outstretched hand

"Dr. Jennifer Trevor? Inspector Jarston." Elegantly, he drew out each syllable of his name.

My heart thumped. Were our children OK?

"I've come to question you regarding a shooting at the resort. I understand you knew a Mr. Windemere?"

I pressed my back against the wall for support. "Yes, I do, did. My husband and I are here for a getaway. We just heard. How horrible!" I jabbered, struggling to grasp why he'd want to talk to me.

"May I come in? I have a few questions."

I took a deep breath and opened the door wider. I wasn't accustomed to entertaining a male guest alone in my hotel room, but who says no to a badge?

"I understand you were Mr. Windemere's counselor."

"How did you know—?"

"From my conversation with Mr. Windemere's wife...oh you meant know that you're here?" Inspector Jarston answered my unfinished question as he strode past me. "When I called your office, your assistant, I believe Ellen was her name, informed me."

I gulped. Ellen would only have revealed my whereabouts if Jarston used his police credentials. Poor thing. She'd be wild with concern and curiosity. I made a mental note to call her later.

"I'm here to discuss Mr. Windemere's emotional state to help clarify if his death was suicide or murder. This will take a few minutes. Mind if I sit?" Jarston lowered himself onto the stuffed armchair near the sliding door leading to the balcony without awaiting my answer.

I sputtered, "Will you excuse me? I'll be right back." I whipped into the washroom, closed the door and splashed cool water on my face. This couldn't be happening. Ever since my first speeding ticket I'd been intimidated by anyone in law enforcement. I patted my



face dry, ordered my legs to stop shaking, and willed my nerves to settle.

When I returned, Jarston's head was bent over his notepad. He reminded me of my junior year high school English teacher. A navy linen blazer covered broad shoulders atop a stocky frame. Perhaps a football player at one time? A thick, brown crew cut topped his serious face. I guessed his age at around sixty.

Keeping as much distance as possible, I perched on the edge of the king-size bed about ten feet away.

Jarston cleared his throat. "You said you knew about Mr. Windemere? How?"

I summarized the waitress' report. "I don't understand why there's confusion about the cause of death?"

Inspector Jarston straightened. "A scrap of paper was in Windemere's pocket with the words, '...can't go on like this' signed Al Windemere. We'll authenticate the signature on the note. Mr. Windemere's wife believes it to be her husband's writing but refuses to believe he'd kill himself. In situations like this, denial is not uncommon."

A shiver crawled up my spine. Inspector Jarston was impersonally discussing the death of a man I cared about. "For the record, we initially investigate every apparent suicide as a homicide."

"Oh." I exhaled the sound softly. I had no idea.

"Mind you, I'm not saying Al Windemere was murdered. The weapon was a forty caliber Glock registered to him. His fingerprints are the only ones on it. Murderers don't normally leave weapons behind; suicide victims do."

"But to go out on a golf course to kill yourself?"

That doesn't make sense."

Jarston raised his shoulders. "Why not? This protects his wife from the burden of finding his bloody body. You may imagine it's not a pretty sight."

"Were there other clues, footprints, whatever?"

His stare bored into me. "Inquisitive, aren't you? Shall I chalk up your questions to too much TV-CSI? I don't mind obliging with an answer. No prints could be traced in the crushed leaves around the trees where his corpse was found. However, the body was in an unusual position for a suicide. A silencer on the handgun eliminated sound. I will admit this seem curious. Why bother deadening the sound if committing suicide?"

I blinked at the picture of the horrific scene forming in my mind. Every inch of me didn't want to imagine it, but I couldn't stop. I focused on the wall behind Jarston where a framed picture depicted a farmyard with two hefty cows grazing. Oh, for the sweet simplicity of a quiet day in the country.

"I can see it's puzzling. How did he get on the course that early?" My detective instincts went into full gear, and I lost my discomfort in his presence. "I mean, if he was shot, where had the murderer come from? The pro shop probably wasn't open yet."

"Rental of private homes bordering the course often includes golf carts. Jarston's voice droned on. "Anyone entering the course before dawn probably wouldn't have been observed at the pro shop until 6:00 AM when staff arrived.

"So, no witnesses?"

He shook his head.

"Who reported the body?" Asking questions would be better than answering his. To my surprise he

humored me.

“A golfer hunting for a ball he hit over the green. He entered the woods, came upon the scene, and reported it at 7:40 AM. Using the number on the golf cart, it was traced back to the Windemere rental villa he and his wife occupied. She was still in bed when we notified her. The unit backed up to hole three on the course. You seem overtly interested in these details? Why?”

“Because suicide seems implausible based on our counseling history.”

“By the way, did you, by any chance, see Mr. Windemere at the resort before his death?”

“I had no idea he was here.”

Jarston made a note on his pad.

I gulped, suddenly realizing why Jarston readily answered my questions. He was sizing me up as a suspect, studying me.

“Enough. Now your turn. “Jarston pulled a folded paper from the inside pocket of his jacket and extended it to me. “Ms. Windemere signed this release. You may speak freely to me about their counseling.”

I reached for the form.

“According to Rose, she attended two sessions for joint marriage counseling. You also had multiple individual appointments with her husband. She’s certain his death was homicide not suicide, and the poor woman is frantic she’ll be the next victim. Your immediate cooperation is essential.”

“Of course. Where’s Rose now?”

“Under police protection at her villa where the family was supposed to celebrate her birthday. Some present sadly.” He whipped out a handkerchief and mopped his forehead.

Client-counselor ethics flashed through my brain. Rose may have signed a release form, but Albert Windemere hadn't. I quickly reviewed client confidentiality boundaries. Information could be revealed in cases of obvious danger to self or others. Rose could be the next victim, she was at risk, because no way did Albert Windemere commit suicide. I had to do all I could to protect her.

My phone beeped. I jumped. Nick would be wondering where I was. I texted him that I'd skip hitting practice balls and meet him on the tee.

"Let's speed this along." Inspector Jarston's tone, quiet but firm, grated on my nerves. "Allow me to make something clear, Dr. Trevor. Your client's right to privacy becomes secondary when there's a question of a life in jeopardy."

I folded the paper he'd given me and handed it back. "Legally correct. Certainly, I can be cooperative without revealing any unnecessary personal information."

"His wife said Mr. Windemere was in treatment about six months total. Is this correct?"

I took a deep breath. "Closer to eight months. I wrote up his discharge last month."

"How frequently did you see him?"

"Weekly visits the first three months then tapered off to every other week, finally becoming monthly, supplemented with phone calls as needed."

"Isn't that a rather short period for major counseling? I thought the process went on for years." The fingers of Jarston's left hand steadily tapped the chair arm.

"Clients know in advance that my specialty is intense, short-term, solution-based therapy—usually six

months is sufficient. Additional sessions can be added if needed.”

Jarston’s phone dinged. He whipped it from the inside pocket of his suit coat, read the message, wrote a response, and tucked it away.

His stoic face reminded me of a talking robot. I pegged him as an introverted, melancholic personality with minimal social skills. Given an intricate problem to solve, I’d expect he’d be content alone indefinitely. The inspector settled back in his chair, obviously staying longer than the few minutes he’d requested.

“Dr. Trevor, please consider carefully before you answer. I’d like your professional opinion regarding Mr. Windemere’s emotional state.”

The air in the room seemed to still, and I rubbed my hands together. Finally, the crux of our conversation. I searched my brain for the best words. I had to say this right.

“Shall I repeat the question?” Jarston asked.

“No, Inspector. Please understand I’m still dealing with shock over this horror. Counselors often develop emotional concern for clients. I know I do, but I’ll do my best to be analytical. I’ve mentally reviewed our sessions and particularly his demeanor. My answer is no. Al Windemere was not suicidal. He was very engaged and hopeful about his future at this point.”

Jarston jotted a note on his pad. “What was his presenting problem during your initial counseling session?”

I closed my eyes to help me think. “When he first came to see me, Al was mildly depressed—which is why he made the appointment.”

Jarston sat up straighter and bristled visibly. “Yet you claim he wasn’t suicidal? Interesting. Then the