

A movie poster for 'Deadly Intent' featuring Lillian Duncan. The background is a dark, blue-tinted image of a woman in a black hooded cloak with a red lining, her hand raised to her face in a thoughtful or sinister gesture. Behind her is a large, ornate building with statues on its roof. The text is overlaid on the image.

**LILLIAN
DUNCAN**

**DOING THE RIGHT THING ISN'T ALWAYS EASY.
IN THIS CASE, IT COULD BE BETHAL.**

**DEADLY
INTENT**

Deadly Intent

Lillian Duncan

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Deadly Intent

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Dedication

This and all I do is for God's glory.

To Michelle Knight, Amanda Berry, and Gina DeJesus.
May each of you write a happy ending for your own
story and may God bless you.

And as always, this story wouldn't have been written
without the love, encouragement, and support from
my wonderful husband, Ronny.

About the Author

Lillian Duncan writes stories of faith mingled with murder & mayhem!

Lillian is a multi-published writer with several Amazon bestsellers, including *The Christmas Stalking* and *Betrayed*. Lillian writes the types of books she loves to read—fast-paced suspense with a touch or two of romance that demonstrates God’s love for all of us.

Whether as an educator, a writer, or a speech pathologist, she believes in the power of words to transform lives, especially God’s Word.

To learn more about Lillian and her books, visit: www.lillianduncan.net. Tiaras & Tennis Shoes is her personal blog at www.lillian-duncan.com.

1

“No, you can’t have him.” She clasped the boy closer, her arms tightening around her son. This wasn’t fair. She had so little. All she wanted was her child. She wouldn’t let him take her son.

The man looked down with what seemed to be compassion in his eyes, though she knew it wasn’t real. “Sorry, it has to be done. The sooner, the better.” His voice was soft, almost kind. “We can’t keep him any longer. He’s just too disruptive. It’s not going to work out.”

Mustering all her courage, she glared at the boy’s father. “No. I won’t let you take him. I’ll make him be good. Please, give me another chance. I’ll make him listen. He’ll be good. I promise.”

He shook his head. “It’s not your fault. Something’s wrong with him. He’s too much to handle.” His arms reached out and grabbed the boy. The child yelled and struggled to stay with his mother. His arms clung to her neck as she clutched him.

In spite of her best efforts, the man pulled her son from her grip. No words came from the boy, only a shrill keening sound—like that of a wounded animal.

She reached up and put her hands on each of his precious cheeks. He stopped screaming as her lips pressed against his for a moment. “Remember, I love you, baby. I love you. I’m so sorry.” Her heart broke as the boy’s father dragged him across the room. “Give

him back to me." How much more could she bear?

The wordless screaming continued.

The father opened the door.

Heartbroken, she crumpled to the floor, unable to follow them.

The man closed the door without another word.

Too soon, her son's screams faded.

And then all she had was a memory.

2

She was going to die. Maven Morris knew it absolutely. If she had to jog one more step, she'd die. She stopped and bent over, gasping for air.

With no shade trees in this part of the park, the afternoon sun beat down. They should have gone in the morning as Lizzie suggested, but Maven hadn't wanted to go then. She wasn't a morning person. Now she regretted her decision.

Lizzie turned towards her with a grin, barely perspiring, obviously awaiting a reply to her idea.

"Are you kidding me? I can't do that." Maven was shocked.

"Why not?"

How did Lizzie manage to look good even when they were jogging? Lizzie was fresh and fashionable in her flowered capris and hot pink T-shirt.

"Of course you can. I know you're the right person for this little boy. You have to believe me. As soon as I saw him, I knew the two of you belonged together. For now—until we find his family."

Maven twisted her back and then did a few leg stretches. "I could never do that. Be a foster parent. That's crazy. And besides why would you give him back to his family? They deserted him."

"Well first, it's the rule. And second, we really don't know that to be true. We can't assume facts not in evidence."

"I suppose that makes sense, sort of." Maven was not really convinced of the wisdom of giving a child back to the family who abandoned him.

Lizzie did a few stretches. "I know you can do it, Maven. I have faith in you even if you don't."

Lizzie's voice held that tone that so often irritated Maven—smug and sure of herself. Lizzie didn't suffer from uncertainty. Once she had an idea, she was always sure it was the exact right thing to do—even when it wasn't. Like this running thing.

Maven had rashly promised to run for the past three months with Lizzie. Her legs had cramped so badly at first, she'd had to spend a lot of time in a tub soaking them afterwards. Of course, Maven had lost ten pounds, but she still couldn't say she enjoyed it. At least her muscles weren't weak and shaky any longer.

Lizzie smiled and started running again.

Maven raised her voice as she increased her own speed. "I am not mom material, you know that. I didn't have any kids, remember? I wouldn't have any idea what to do. There's no way I can foster a child, especially one with special needs. Even temporarily."

Lizzie sprinted ahead, but then slowed to wait for Maven to catch up. "See what I mean? You have no faith in yourself. You've told me hundreds of times that you consider yourself a teacher first and a speech pathologist second, right?" Lizzie ran her fingers through her blonde hair, her blue eyes bright with hope.

"What does that have to do with anything?" Maven wiped the sweat from her face.

"Everything." Lizzie's hands made an all-encompassing motion. "Teachers don't just teach, they take care of their students. You know that. And that

means you can take care of this child, but if you don't want to, I can understand. I'm not going to lie to you, he's a difficult child—a very difficult child."

Maven felt the tug on her heart.

Was that God sending her a message?

She doubted it. Being a mother, even temporarily, terrified her. Of course, there'd been a time when she thought she'd die if she didn't have a child. But God had other plans for her. "I'm sorry. I just can't do it. The condo's not set up for a child. There's no way I could manage." She jogged the last few steps to catch up with Lizzie. "I really am sorry."

"Don't worry about it. I just thought since you aren't working right now, it would be a good fit for both of you. Keep walking—fast."

Maven moved her hand to her mouth. The reason she wasn't working was Bell's palsy, which had left the left side of her face and mouth partially paralyzed. "I know I'm not working now, but that could change. See, my smile is almost normal again. The problem is, very little lip movement."

Her school board had insisted Maven take a temporary medical leave. Her recovery had been slow—too slow, and it seemed as if the medical leave might become permanent. After all, who wanted a speech pathologist with partially-paralyzed facial muscles?

"Be patient. It took a long time for your recovery to start. It could still happen. I just thought fostering this child would give you something to do now that you're not working with Ella any longer. By the way, how is Ella?"

"She's going back to school in the fall."

"Wow, that is amazing. What's she studying?"

"She changed her major to speech pathology."

"Double wow!" Lizzie sped up. "OK, almost time to sprint."

"No sprint. I'm tired."

"But you look marvelous, dahling."

Maven laughed.

"Don't worry about not wanting to foster the little boy. I knew it was a long shot. But I really thought you were the best person for this child. He needs someone special. And I don't know anyone more special than you." Lizzie grinned as she started jogging.

Maven shook her head as she sped up. "Wow, that's a really good line. You must have been saving it for a long time."

"Not true. I am being completely sincere. You are special and you are the perfect person to take care of this child. When I saw the poor thing, I thought of you immediately. But it's a big commitment, so I understand. Really I do. Faster." Her jog became a run.

Maven forced herself to keep up. "Because I'm so special or because I'm a speech pathologist?"

"Both. But no reason to feel guilty. I don't blame you, but I had to ask."

"The answer is no to being his foster mother, but if you want me to look at him as a speech pathologist, I'd be happy to."

"Well, I'll take what I can get, but I can't pay you. No money in the budget."

Money wasn't much of an issue. Between her forced medical disability, the bonus from the Deckers, and the occasional private client, her finances were in good shape. "Not a problem. I'll do it pro bono. So, tell me about him." She still had to half-jog to keep up with Lizzie's power walking speed.

“That’s just it. We know nothing about him. Not even his name. He’s not talking. He might be deaf or autistic or something else. Mostly he just sits, and he screams if anyone goes near him or tries to touch him.”

“That definitely could be autism. What do you know about him?”

“He was found in the park, naked and dirty. Not a clue to his identity. This park, actually. Over by the playground. He looks to be about three or four, but we’re not sure. The doctors say he’s malnourished, so it’s possible he could be a few years older. It’s hard to know at this point since he won’t talk.”

“Nobody’s reported him missing?”

“They’ve checked all the missing children’s databases and the FBI’s, of course. He doesn’t fit any missing child’s reports. We don’t know where he came from.”

“Well, everyone belongs somewhere.” Maven stopped to catch her breath. “How could somebody do that to a child?”

“It’s an evil world, my friend, an evil world.”

3

The next morning Maven stood in an observation room staring at the child on the other side of the mirror.

He'd arranged toys in a circle and now sat in the middle of the circle. He no longer played with them, touched them, or even looked at them. It was as if they didn't exist once he'd arranged his circle. The objective seemed to be to build a barrier between himself and the rest of the world.

Poor thing. What must he be thinking and feeling? To be abandoned by his family, to be in a new situation, not knowing anyone, not being able to communicate with anybody.

She couldn't blame him for building the barrier. Not belonging anywhere was tough. She understood how it felt. Though her situation wasn't nearly as extreme.

The boy sat staring at the wall, not moving, no expression on his face. Possibly a cover for his fear and confusion. He was cleaned and clothed, but it was hard to believe he was a boy. His long blond curls and his intense blue eyes made him look like a girl.

Maven turned from the observation glass towards Lizzie. "He's beautiful. Almost angelic."

"You wouldn't say that if you'd been around for baths or dressing him."

"A handful, huh?"

“That’s an understatement. It took three workers to get the job done. He freaks out when anybody touches him. Besides refusing to communicate, he appears to have some behavioral issues.”

“He might not be refusing to communicate. It’s possible he *can’t* communicate.”

“I suppose you might be right. But either way has the same results so—”

“But there’s a big difference between *can’t* and *won’t*. Monumental difference.”

Lizzie’s blond waves shook along with her head. “See, this is what I mean. That’s why you are the perfect person to foster this child until we find out where he belongs. You understand the difference. That means you’ll be more patient, kinder, more loving. And he needs as much of that as he can get.”

Another tug on her heart. Maven shut down her pity. There was no way she could take care of this child. “Not going to happen, so stop the guilt trip, Lizzie. I said I’d help. Besides, he has a perfectly safe place to stay until you find out where he belongs.”

“If we find out. And yes, he’s safe, but not necessarily happy or loved. Every child deserves to be loved, to belong somewhere. And right now, this poor little boy has nowhere to belong. Are you going to go in?” Her friend touched her arm. “I’m not trying to put you on a guilt trip. Really.”

All by himself. So sad.

Maven hardened her heart to Lizzie’s words and answered. “No I’m not going in, you are.”

“Me?” Lizzie sounded as surprised as she looked.

“That’s right. I want to see how he reacts when you try to communicate. Go in and talk with him, try to get him to play. I’ll knock on the mirror when I’ve

seen enough.”

~*~

Lizzie walked into the room.

The boy showed no reaction. Had he heard her?

Lizzie stood outside of the circle of toys. She smiled. “Hi.”

Not even a slight movement. Maybe he was deaf. But even then, he’d be aware that she was in the room.

Lizzie moved from beside him to directly in front of him. “Hi. How are you, sweetie?”

He stared straight ahead at the wall. No eye contact. No response to her voice.

Lizzie stepped inside the circle.

The boy’s muscles tensed. Well, maybe he hadn’t heard Lizzie, but he sure knew she was there. That was clear from his body language, but he still didn’t look at her.

Lizzie sat down cross-legged in front of him.

He scooted away from her to the far edge of the circle of toys. It was obvious he had no desire to interact with her.

“Hi, sweetie. What’s your name?”

Instead of looking at Lizzie, he tilted to one side so he could stare around her and at the same spot on the wall that he’d been watching before she came in.

“My name is Lizzie.” She picked up the small red fire engine beside her. “Do you—”

“Aaaahhhh.” The boy screamed as he lunged for the toy in Lizzie’s hand. He wrenched it from her grip, and then threw it across the room. Still screaming, he stood up. One by one, he picked up the other toys and threw them around the room, some of them hitting the

wall and others not. The screaming continued as Maven watched through the observation window on the other side.

Lizzie stood up backing away from him. Her gaze moved to the mirror, begging Maven to free her.

Maven knocked on the window.

Lizzie rolled her eyes and headed for the door.

The boy was still screaming when she left.

As soon as the door closed, the boy stopped screaming.

Lizzie opened the door to the observation room. “Wow. I didn’t expect that sort of reaction. Most kids like me—or at least tolerate me.”

“He’s not most kids.”

“You can say that again. I feel so horrible. I didn’t mean to upset him like that. And I didn’t know how to comfort him since he doesn’t like to be touched.” She wiped at her tears.

“It’s not your fault, Lizzie. And I don’t think there’s anything either of us can do to comfort him. He definitely has some autistic tendencies.”

They both stared through the mirror as the boy retrieved each of the toys and replaced them into their original positions of his circle. When it was complete, he sat down and stared at his spot on the wall once again.

4

A quick review of the recording showed he'd not only replaced the toys in the exact same order, but as far as Maven could see, they were almost in the exact same spot as before.

Very interesting.

"OK, my turn." Maven turned towards Lizzie. "I guess I'll give it a try. Hopefully, I can make some sort of connection with him."

"I'm sure you will."

"Don't count on it." She walked out of the observation room and into the boy's space.

Ignoring the boy, she went to the toy bins at the side of the room. Picking up a small pink teddy bear, she walked to the opposite wall and placed the toy. One by one, she chose toys and formed her own circle, a car, a helicopter among them.

At first, the little boy didn't react. After the sixth toy, his gaze followed Maven as she moved from one side to the other choosing toys and forming her own circle.

When her circle was completed, she sat in the middle just as the boy was in the middle of his circle. Her back was to him. After ten minutes or so, she turned to face him, still not looking at him directly.

He was watching her.

With deliberate slowness, she picked up the pink teddy bear. First, she held it, and then she rocked it for

a moment before replacing it in her circle. She sat quietly, refusing to look directly at the boy.

He leaned forward and picked up the brown teddy bear in his circle. He rocked it as if it was a baby, and then replaced it to its rightful spot. His gaze moved to Maven.

After a moment, she chose a toy car. Rolling it back and forth, she made car noises. After a few minutes, she replaced it and waited.

Sure enough, the boy picked the red fire engine, and then imitated the car noises.

Maven smiled. The boy wasn't completely deaf or he couldn't have done that. He still might have a hearing loss, but not so much that it would prevent him from communicating. One question answered.

After several more toys and imitations, she was positive the boy wasn't deaf. His refusal to communicate had nothing to do with a hearing loss.

Her guess was that either he was traumatized by whatever events led him to be abandoned in the park or some form of autism. Possibly a combination of the two.

Maven walked out of her circle and to the door. She waited with her hand at her side.

A minute or so later, the little blond boy stood. He stepped carefully out of his circle and walked to Maven. He stood quietly for several moments, and then the back of his hand brushed hers.