



WITNESSES TO DEATH

A THRILLER

FROM DERRINGER AWARD WINNER

DAVE WHITE

Witness to Death

A Thriller

By

Dave White

To Allan Guthrie
The most dedicated, hardworking agent I know.

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“Since knowledge is but sorrow’s spy, it is not safe to know.”
-William Davenant

PART ONE

JERSEY CITY

CHAPTER 1



What would his shrink say?

John Brighton knew the answer to that. He was supposed to get his mind off Ashley. He should be at a pub with one of his buddies drinking the night away, getting in a bar fight, bitching her out, something. Instead he was circling the side streets looking for Frank's Lexus.

He could see his shrink now, sitting in the thick easy chair, legs crossed with a yellow notepad on her lap. Her elbows would be balanced on the armrests, her fingers steepled and pressed to her nose. She'd gaze at him over the top of her fingers and wait. Until the point when he'd just start guessing what she was thinking about his current mental state. He wondered if his students felt the same way once he'd decided to use that tactic on them.

John felt like he was driving in a fog, the narrowing of his peripheral vision. His chest was tight, and when he breathed deep, the air didn't seem to fill his lungs.

He made a left turn and saw the black Lexus in the driveway. The house was dark inside, with only a light on in the second floor window. John cursed himself for searching out the Lexus.

John parked on the corner, sat back and watched the front door. He was sure Frank would peek his head out at some point. Michelle had told him Frank was going to be out tonight, but she didn't know where. Some sort of work thing. But John doubted that was the truth. Not after he saw Frank talking to the girl in the hat at Starbucks a few weeks ago.

Frank came out of the house, skipped down the front steps and got into the car. *Here we go.* The Lexus backed out and pulled right past John's

Corolla. John waited a second, started the car and U-turned to follow.

He tried to keep his distance, but Frank drove fast and John needed to keep up. He wondered why they were going toward Jersey City. And again he wondered why he was doing this. What was he trying to prove? No matter what he found out, it wasn't going to be something that would make Michelle happy.

Did he want her to break up with Frank?

John spent the next twenty minutes following the Lexus along Route Three to Kennedy Boulevard. When they parked, John realized he hadn't thought about Ashley in that time.

The Lexus was backed into a spot looking at the light rail. John passed, then parked his Corolla on the corner, where he hoped he was out of sight.

This is stupid. This is stupid. This is stupid.

Frank had never done anything bad to him. He should just back out, go home, and drink. But he'd been wondering for too long about Frank. John needed to know, if only to distract him from his own problems. Whether or not he'd tell Michelle would depend on what he found out. So he sat, the motor running and the heat blowing on a frigid February night.

The train pulled into the station. John had never been in this neighborhood. He was surprised to see the number of bars and restaurants. It appeared Jersey City was undergoing some sort of revival. His image of the city was a ghetto filled with gangs, murders, and terrorist sleeper cells. That was what the news publicized, anyway. But it seemed the news missed a lot.

The train took off heading toward Hoboken or Bayonne or wherever. He turned his attention back toward the Lexus, only to see Frank getting out. John looked toward the station again and saw a group of five or six men—most of them wearing black trenchcoats—heading toward the Hudson River.

John put his hand on the key. *Put the car in drive and go home.* That was the smartest option.

Frank glanced over his shoulder in John's direction. Then kept walking. John had to know where he was going—where was the girl? She probably lived in one of the condos down the river walk. He zipped his coat, got out of the car, and followed.

The wind off the water tore at his ears as he got closer to the buildings. Frank had turned one more time as they walked. John hoped he wasn't spotted. That would be embarrassing.

He stepped through the corridor between the two buildings, squinting against the wind. He stopped and stared at the water. A lead ball formed in his stomach and his feet were glued to the asphalt. Sweat formed at the nape of his neck. He closed his eyes and listened to the waves slap against the concrete barrier.

This has nothing to do with why you're here. *Find out where Frank is*

going. You'll be fine.

Digging his nails into his palms, John took a deep breath and stepped forward.

Reaching the edge of the building—still ten feet from the edge of the river—John turned right. As he did, he saw the group of men had stopped and were looking at Frank Carnathan, who was walking toward them, albeit slower than he was walking before. One of the men, an Arabic looking one, not wearing a trenchcoat yelled, “That’s Peter!” After he spoke, he stopped walking.. The trenchcoats kept coming.

Frank stopped, dropped his hands at his sides. Then he turned back toward John and broke out into a sprint.

Behind Frank, the five men in trenchcoats pointed guns at him.