

Chapter Two

“He’s out.”

Ryan didn’t need to ask who. There was only one reason his one time friend, FBI agent Dave Graham at Quantico would call him.

Nervous tension filled his body.

“Are you there?” Dave asked. “Did you hear me?”

“I heard,” he answered, trying not to let the fear coiling inside him like a spring take control. “How? When?”

“We think it was a couple of days ago.”

“A couple of days ago? And you’re just now calling me?” Ryan closed his eyes. “Wait,” he said. “You THINK?”

“We didn’t discover it until late last night.”

“How could one of the most notorious serial killers in U.S. history escape from custody and no one noticed until late last night?”

A heavy sigh released on the other end.

“Ryan, look – “

“No,” he interrupted. “I want to know how this son of a bitch escaped FBI maximum security.”

“It looks like he was working with one of the guards. About four days ago, Crane started having severe stomach pains and was sent to the infirmary. Sometime between being admitted and last night, he disappeared. The guard’s been arrested, but he’s lawyered up and not talking. No one really knows how Crane escaped.”

“And you have no idea where he is.”

“We have some ideas.”

“I would hope so.”

“Look, Ryan, I don’t think he’s going to come after you. He’s probably already in Mexico or South America by now. He’d want to get out of the country as soon as possible.”

Ryan frowned as he stared out the window of his Miami condo.

“The fact that you just said that, tells me you don’t know him at all.”

“Right. Which is where you come in.”

“Me?”

“Yes. You’re the one who nailed him last time. You’re the one who knows him best. We need your help.”

“No thanks.”

“You could save someone’s life.”

“I’m choosing to save my own.”

Ryan hung up and walked out on the balcony. Was Crane somewhere out there now, watching him?

William Crane was a multi-millionaire investor by day and one of the most brutal and notorious murderers on the planet by night. He specialized in young, beautiful women.

He would have his pick of those in Miami.

Once he got rid of Ryan.

Ryan walked over to his bar and poured himself two shots of Jack Daniels, downing them quickly. The last time he and Crane met alone, Crane was taken into custody and Ryan was taken to the emergency room. He almost died. He had a large ugly scar running from the middle of his chest down to his hips, reminding him of Crane’s evil nature every single day.

The physicians back in Virginia never failed to tell him how amazed they

were that he wasn't dead. He should have been. His injuries should have killed him.

Despite how curious the doctors were over his will to live, none of them were as fascinated as Crane himself. He seemed genuinely shocked to see Ryan at his trial months later, even though he'd heard through the prison grapevine the green as grass FBI agent managed to pull through.

Ryan didn't talk about it. He never mentioned anything about Crane, or his part in his capture. The brutal attack he endured while awaiting backup was permanently etched in his memory. It still gave him nightmares.

Months of recuperation and years of psychological counseling helped him move past it. Though in truth, no one ever really moves on after almost becoming a statistic. It stays with you. It makes a permanent impact.

More than likely, Crane promised the guard a vault full of money. And Crane had money. A lot of it.

Somewhere.

The FBI was not successful at locating it. They knew Crane's money was stashed all over the world in secret corporate bank accounts and shadow corporations impossible to find, even for the FBI.

Ryan walked over to the bar, unscrewed the top of liquid courage and poured himself another shot.

Bill Crane would be coming for him. Of that much he was certain. He said as much at his sentencing hearing when the judge asked him if he had anything he'd like to say.

"I'll be seeing you, again," Crane smiled, his teeth a perfect white as he looked over at Ryan.

That was all. No other statement. No feigned remorse for his victims and their families. No protestations of innocence.

Just a promise to Ryan they would see one another again.

Most of his colleagues took that threat to be meaningless. Ryan, still struggling with getting back on his feet, knew Crane was dead serious. He wasn't just a killer, he had a brilliant mind and he liked to outwit people. Ryan outwitted him and Crane didn't like that. He also didn't make idle threats.

The moment Ryan was dreading and waiting for over the last eight years finally arrived. Crane was out and no one knew where he was.

Ryan walked over to the door to his condo and checked the locks again before heading back out onto his balcony to stare out over the turquoise waters of Biscayne Bay. He closed his eyes and breathed deep of the warm, salty air.

He tried not to think of Crane out there somewhere watching him, stalking him, waiting for him. The thought terrified him, something he wouldn't admit to anyone but himself.

His knowledge that Crane would come after him one day was a fact he filed away deep in his mind. When Crane was sentenced, his friends back at Quantico were fearful he would try to hire someone to finish the job on Ryan.

They didn't know Crane like he did. That wasn't his style.

Ryan got inside Bill Crane's head. Crane was a man who thrived on the chase. He liked the game. He liked to be challenged.

Hiring someone to do the job for him would be too easy. Too pedestrian. Too common.

Crane was many things, but common was not one of them.

Bill Crane was the reason Ryan never married or had a family. He never wanted the serial killer to have ammunition to use against him when this day came. He couldn't afford the luxury of a family when someone like Crane had him in his sights.

Ryan kept everyone at arm's length. No one ever really was allowed to get close to him. Many had tried. There were no best friends. There were no girlfriends. If a woman started pushing for more than a casual date, Ryan walked away and never looked back.

He was alone by choice. It was safer for everyone that way.

Deep in thought, he nearly jumped out of his skin when his phone rang again. At first, he thought it might be Dave calling him back, trying to persuade him to help the FBI track Crane down. However, when he saw the caller id as Unknown, he hesitated.

Deciding to let it roll to voicemail, he stared at the phone waiting for the message bell to sound. It never did.

"Probably just a telemarketer," he told himself. "Crane wouldn't have this number anyway."

He walked inside and was about to place his phone on the table, when he felt the vibration as it started to ring again.

He swallowed, then accepted the call.

“Hello?” he answered.

“Hello, Ryan,” Crane’s smooth, educated voice filtered through the phone. “How are you?”

“Great,” Ryan answered, his heart beating as though he’d just run a 100 yard dash. “You?”

Ryan could hear Crane chuckle.

“I supposed your friends at the FBI already alerted you to my escape. That would explain why you’re not surprised to hear my voice.”

Ryan remained silent, letting Crane do all of the talking.

“Have they put a trace on your phone?” Crane wondered aloud.

Ryan swallowed. “I wouldn’t know.”

“It doesn’t matter. I’ll be off the phone and will discard this useless thing in a moment.”

“Where are you?” Ryan asked.

“Would you believe me if I told you?”

“Probably not.”

“Good decision.”

An awkward silence followed for a several seconds.

“What is it you want, Crane? You want to finish what you started?” Ryan spoke with a bravado he did not feel. “Come and get me.”

“Hmmm. As tempting as that sounds, I have something better in mind.”

“Really? What could that possibly be?”

“I expect you to come get me,” Crane purred through the receiver.

“And why would I do that when the entire FBI will be doing that job for me?”

“Because you and I both know they won’t find me. Not a single one of them found me last time. It was you, a wet behind the ears rookie who cracked my code and figured out who and where I was.”

“I’m flattered you think so highly of me,” Ryan deadpanned.

“I’m betting you can do it again.”

“Sorry, not interested.”

“You will be.”

“Why?”

Crane remained silent.

“I have a present for you,” he finally said.

“What kind of present?”

“A good one.”

“I don’t like your presents. Your presents suck. They’re usually bloody and come in a box. No thanks.”

“You’ll like this present.”

Ryan was about to goad him more, until he realized Crane had ended the call.

He didn’t want to dwell on what kind of present Crane could send him. It could be anything.

Just then a loud clap of thunder rolled and lightening flashed as though the atmosphere could sense the doom descending on Ryan’s soul.

A few minutes later, the downpour of rain cascaded over the building.

He shut the sliding doors to his balcony and turned toward the bar to pour himself another shot when someone starting banging on his door.

Reacting, he grabbed the loaded Glock he kept in the kitchen and made his way toward the door.

The banging continued.

He glanced through the peephole at an attractive woman with light brown hair, soaked to the skin, looking anxious and preparing to pound on his door again. She didn't appear to have a weapon.

Appearances could be deceiving.

Ryan unlatched the safety on his gun and opened the door a crack.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"Are you Ryan?" she asked in return.

"What do you want?" he asked again.

"My sister's been kidnapped," she said, desperation marking her agitated movements. "The man who has her sent me this address, told me to ask for Ryan and wait for further instructions."

Ryan weighed whether or not this woman seemed to be a threat and decided she was not. Even if she was, she was so small, he could break her in two with a simple twist of her back.

He opened the door wide enough for her to get in, but didn't put away the gun.

Her gaze darted around the condo as she entered, settling almost immediately on the gun in his hand.

"Are you going to kill me?" she asked.

"Are you going to kill me?" he answered.

"No."

Ryan put the safety back on and holstered his gun.

"Then I guess I won't be killing you either."