

## Chapter Fifteen

Cassandra often wondered about what West Palm Beach was really like. She envisioned wealthy women dripping in jewels, men wearing suits that cost more than her car and mansions lining the ocean.

She was not disappointed.

Ryan slowly cruised the Wrangler down Worth Avenue where Cassandra took in the massive amount of luxury. She could not help but think of the dichotomy between the horror of what they'd just discovered and the opulence she was now seeing.

"Where do people get this kind of money?" she wondered aloud, not really expecting an answer.

"Inheritance. Stocks. Real Estate," he offered. "Who knows?"

"We just passed a jewelry store with a necklace in it that I am sure cost at least a million dollars."

"That would not surprise me."

"How could you even feel safe walking around with that kind of money hanging around your neck?"

"If it were me," he said. "I'd have a duplicate made using cubic zirconia, stick the real one in a vault and wear the fake. But that's just me."

Cassandra continued to stare out the window, taking in the Lamborghinis and other outward proclamations of wealth.

“But then why even buy the real thing in the first place? It’s not like they’re a good investment. It’s a false market.”

Ryan smiled at her.

“You’re asking the wrong person,” he said, keeping his eyes on the road. “I don’t have that kind of money and I don’t run in those kinds of circles.”

“Who are these people? I don’t think I’ve ever met anyone with that kind of money.”

“Yes you have.”

Cassandra turned to look at him.

“Crane,” he explained. “He’s got that kind of money.”

“But didn’t his victims’ families sue for some kind of restitution? Doesn’t he owe them tens of millions of dollars?”

“Yes. But they will never see a dime of it.”

“Why not?”

“Crane hid every penny in bank accounts all over the world. Despite their extensive resources, even the FBI couldn’t track it down.”

“Wow.” Cassandra continued her inventory of luxury. “How much money do you think he has?”

“I heard one forensic accountant at the Bureau estimate Crane’s worth at close to \$750 million.”

Cassandra’s jaw dropped open.

“Are you serious?”

“Yes.”

“But –“

“But how could he have that much money and why did he turn into a sociopathic serial killer?”

“Yes!”

"I don't think any of us can understand how anyone can turn into a killer of this magnitude," he answered. "It seems to be particularly confounding when you learn Crane was raised as an only child in extreme wealth. What made him turn into a killer when he seemingly had everything?"

"Abuse?"

"We never found any indication he was abused. If anything, he was coddled and excused and given everything he could ever want."

Cassandra let that information soak in.

"His parents?"

"He killed them. Their bodies were found buried on the grounds of their Connecticut estate about two years ago. They'd been dead for almost fifteen years."

"He really is a monster."

Ryan continued to drive, pulling over when he saw the address of the jewelry store he suspected Crane wanted them to enter.

"We spoke to some of his childhood playmates and got quite an earful of his adolescent escapades."

"Like?"

"Torturing animals, almost killing a pre-school classmate "accidentally" of course."

"No!"

"Yes. Apparently he was very good at covering his tracks." He looked over at Cassandra. "Or his parents were."

"So he would commit these atrocities and his parents would what? Pay people off?"

"We think so."

"Wow," she sighed. "Just ... wow. And to pay them back, he killed them?"

Ryan shrugged his shoulders.

"Maybe he realized what kind of monster he'd become and threatened to cut

him off financially. Maybe they wanted to clear their conscience in their old age and were going to turn him in. We don't know. They had several residences spread out all over the world, I think their friends just assumed they were traveling."

"How did they discover the bodies?"

"One of the grounds people was arrested for a DUI. He offered up information in exchange for a lighter plea deal. He told a police officer he thought Crane had killed his parents and buried them in the rose garden."

"How did he know?"

"According to the gardener, the rose garden was his responsibility, but one day, Crane met him at work, told him his parents had left for Europe on an extended vacation and left him in charge. He said the rose garden was off limits, that he was going to tend to that area from now on and no one was to step foot in it. The man thought it was strange, but he couldn't really question the owner's son. He needed the paycheck."

"But he did check it out?"

Ryan nodded. "He went there after dark and walked around. He said everything looked normal except for one row. He said he couldn't put his finger on it, but that it seemed to him that the roses almost looked as though they'd been dug up and then put back."

"And that's where they found Crane's parents?"

"Yes."

"I cannot even imagine."

"I won't go into details, but it was a pretty brutal crime according to the autopsies."

Cassandra continued to sit in the car, taking in Ryan's words.

"So Crane kills his parents, inherits everything and hides his assets so the victims' families cannot collect his money?"

"Pretty much. Crane, of course, could afford to hire the best."

"So the families recovered nothing?"

Again Ryan shrugged. "The last I heard they'd recovered a measly ten million."

“Where do you think he has it hidden?”

“No one knows. It could be in boxes in an apartment in Dubai under an assumed name for all anyone knows.”

“Then why not just leave the country when he escaped? Why all of this?”

“I don’t think the money has any real meaning for him. When he says he wants you to play the game, that is what it is to him. It’s a game. It’s pretty obvious he doesn’t have a shred of feeling towards his victims. They are something to play with until he’s done with them.”

“And this game we’re playing now?”

“I think he’s disappointed I survived and I think he saw you as someone he would enjoy pitting his mind against. He likes the manipulation. He likes to play games with people’s lives. He likes to win.”

“He didn’t win with you.”

“No. That’s why he wants a rematch of sorts. He wants to prove he can beat me.”

“And if he doesn’t?”

“Then I think he’s prepared to die, which makes him even more dangerous.”

Cassandra nodded her head and took a deep breath.

“I guess we should go inside and see what else he has in store for us.”

Wordlessly, Ryan stepped out of the Jeep, walked around and helped Cassandra out of the car.

“Do you think we’ll get laughed out of the store wearing t-shirts and jeans?” she asked.

“Only one way to find out.”

It only took a short walk to find the small jewelry boutique, Lucreaux. The door was locked and they had to wait to be buzzed inside. Cassandra looked at Ryan as the door buzzed for them to come in and an armed guard nodded toward them.

Once inside, Cassandra could see why.

Rows upon rows of diamonds and gems encrusted in some of the most elaborate necklaces, earrings, bracelets and rings lined the walls and cases within the small space. There was hundreds of millions of dollars on the walls of this store.

“Can I help you?” a woman of about fifty inquired as they entered.

“I’m not sure,” Ryan said, walking toward her, clearly not as mesmerized by the sparkling trinkets around them.

“Are you looking for something?” she asked. “A ring? A bracelet? Perhaps your friend would like to try on one of our diamond necklaces?”

“Really?” Cassandra asked. “You’d let me do that?”

The woman smiled.

“Of course. What good is jewelry if it’s not worn and enjoyed?”

Cassandra tried not to look as anxious as she felt when the woman walked over to the wall and pulled a suite of pink diamond jewelry from the case.

“May I?” she inquired and Cassandra turned to allow her to put the necklace around her neck. The earrings, bracelet and ring soon followed. Cassandra couldn’t help admiring the opulent jewels sparkling at her throat.

“They’re stunning,” she whispered. “How much money am I wearing right now?”

“For everything? Fifteen million, but if you wanted to purchase them as a total, I could probably cut you a deal.”

“I think I need to take them off,” Cassandra reached for the clasp on the bracelet, but felt the woman’s hand on hers.

“There’s no rush,” she assured her. “Enjoy them a while longer. George wouldn’t let you leave with them without paying, so relax and relish the feel of the gems.”

The woman moved back toward Ryan.

“Since you’re obviously not shopping, what can I help you with?”

“I think someone may have left something for us?” he asked. “A package?”

The woman continued to look at him, scrutinizing him.

“Is there a name I should know?” she asked.

“Ryan Donovan,” he answered.

“Ahhhh,” she purred. “Mr. and Mrs. Donovan. Yes. I do have something for you. Excuse me.”

Ryan turned to see Cassandra moving slightly left and right, catching the light on the diamonds from every angle.

“You look beautiful in fifteen million dollars worth of diamonds,” he smiled.

“Who wouldn’t?” she smiled back.

A few seconds later, the woman emerged from the back holding a velvet box. Ryan reached for it and she held it back.

“It’s for her,” she smiled, looking at Cassandra.

“Me?” The woman nodded and handed the box to her.

Cassandra walked to the counter and set the box down, looking at Ryan as she lifted the lid. There was another velvet case, a large envelope and a set of keys.

Tentatively, she opened the smaller velvet box and gasped when she saw the enclosed diamond earrings.

“They’re four carats each,” she said. “And they’re yours.”

“Mine?” Cassandra couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“What’s in the envelope?” Ryan asked.

Cassandra opened the flap and pulled out the papers.

“It looks like some kind of deed,” she said.

“To what?”

“The address is here in Palm Beach,” she said. “It’s a house on Ocean Boulevard.”

“Who’s the owner?”

Cassandra flipped through the sheets of paper before suddenly stopping. She looked up at Ryan.

“Me.”