

## Chapter Twelve

Cassandra and Ryan walked into the fairytale suite, not sure what to expect. They were amazed by what they saw.

No detail was left to chance. It was like a fairytale cottage, which Cassandra supposed was what they were going for with this theme. She couldn't help smiling as she took in the bathtub area with the stained glass surround and the beautiful surroundings.

"Not many people get to experience a night in Cinderella's castle. Enjoy your night," the host said before closing the door.

"Can something be opulent and cozy at the same time?" Cassandra wondered aloud, noting her backpack as well as Ryan's had been placed in the bedroom of the suite.

"If it can, this place would be it," Ryan answered, walking around and checking things out.

"Do you think he has it bugged?"

"It wouldn't surprise me."

"Something smells good and I'm famished," Cassandra said, looking at the candlelit table for two that was prepared beforehand. Romantic didn't begin to describe the display before her. She walked to an elaborately decorated side table filled with domed dishes. "Wow!"

"What is it?"

"Pretty much anything you could hope for. This redefines 'fit for a king,'" she turned to look at Ryan. "Or queen."

Steaming dishes of filet mignon, lobster, shrimp, potatoes, grilled vegetables and salad awaited them.

“What’s for dessert?” Ryan wondered, stepping to the last dome. Cassandra couldn’t resist lifting one of the small cupcakes and taking a bite.

“You’re supposed to eat your dinner first,” Ryan scolded.

“I’ve never been one to follow the rules,” Cassandra shot back.

The two picked up plates and sat down to eat what could only be described as the richest dinner of their lives.

“I don’t even want to think how much fat is in this meal,” Cassandra mentioned, taking another roll and smearing it with butter.

“I think the potatoes have cheese and herbs in them,” Ryan commented, helping himself to another plate.

“When was the last time we ate?” Cassandra asked.

“This morning?” Ryan answered, looking at the clock. “Almost 24 hours ago.”

“No wonder I’m starving.”

By the time the two had finished eating, they could barely get up from the table.

“I don’t think I’ve ever eaten anything that rich before,” Ryan said, offering his hand to Cassandra and helping her from her chair. “

“I think we can both agree that there is a reason people only eat this way once and a while. I haven’t felt this full since last Thanksgiving when I ate an entire pie.”

Ryan looked at her and laughed.

“An entire pie?”

“It was pecan chocolate chess,” she defended herself. “It’s my favorite and I only have it at Thanksgiving.”

“I’ve never had pie,” Ryan commented.

“What?”

“I’ve never had pie,” he said again.

“Never? Like in ever?” Cassandra couldn’t believe what she was hearing.

“It’s no big deal.”

“It is in the South,” she said. “When we’re finally out of this situation, I promise to make you a pecan chocolate chess pie. Trust me, you’ll never be the same.”

Ryan looked at her intently.

“I don’t think I ever will be the same since meeting you,” he said.

Cassandra met his gaze. Ryan took her hand and they walked to the window overlooking the park.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” she said.

“Not half as beautiful as you.”

“Ryan,” she started to say something than stopped.

“We are in an impossible situation,” he said. “We are two strangers brought together by a narcissistic psychopath who has his own agenda. Your sister is in danger. All of that aside, I cannot deny what I’m feeling for you.”

“I know,” she answered. “Neither can I.”

Ryan leaned over her, taking her face in his hands and kissed her. This kiss was not for show. It wasn’t for the onlookers. It was a real kiss. The kind of kiss a woman dreams about her entire life. It was deep, sensuous and full.

Whether their desperate circumstances, their need to release the tension building inside them or the intense feelings growing between them, the kiss deepened. It transformed from tenderness, to passion as though someone struck a match and then threw it on a pile of wood doused with gasoline.

It was several minutes before they came up for air.

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” Cassandra said.

“I know,” Ryan answered.

“This is crazy.”

“I know.”

Ryan leaned forward to kiss her once more and Cassandra eagerly met him.

After several more minutes, Cassandra pushed herself away.

“What’s wrong?” Ryan asked, concern etching his features.

“I don’t know. All of a sudden, I’m not feeling so well.”

Ryan walked her over to the couch and sat down next to her.

“I know what you mean,” he said. “My stomach’s not feeling so great either.”

Cassandra gave a weak smile.

“We’re making each other sick,” she joked.

“Or we ate too much rich food.”

Suddenly it dawned on Cassandra they had eaten food Crane ordered for them.

“You don’t think - ”

“He poisoned us?”

Cassandra nodded her head.

“That’s not his style,” he answered. “He likes opponents who can fight back. It makes him feel more powerful when he defeats them.”

Cassandra looked at him and Ryan was quick to reassure her.

“Except this time,” he clarified. “This time we will defeat him.”

“Owww,” Summer said, grabbing her middle and bending over in pain. “Are you sure he didn’t poison us?”

Ryan lay back against the couch holding his own cramping stomach.

“Hey - You don’t happen to have something in that oil bag for this do you?”

Cassandra’s eyes opened wide.

“As a matter of fact, I do!”

She pushed herself off the couch and made her way to the bedroom,

searching through the backpack for her oil bag.

“Got it!” she called from the other room.

Victorious, she came back and thrust a bottle in front of him.

“What is this?”

“DiGize!” she exclaimed. “Sydney gave me some when this very thing happened on a cruise. It was a lifesaver!”

Ryan unscrewed the top, took a sniff and grimaced.

“This does not smell good.”

“I know, but trust me, it works for times like these.”

Cassandra reached and took the bottle from him. “It says it’s a vitality, so we can use it in some water and drink it.”

“You want me to drink that?”

“Yes. Trust me.”

Cassandra poured some bottle water into two glasses and put several drops in each, mixing them with the stainless steel spoon from the table.

They toasted one another and drank the liquid down.

“How long does it take to work?” he asked.

“Not long. It was about fifteen minutes later when I started to feel better on the cruise.”

Silently, they sat together, their hands entwined as they waited.

“How are you feeling?” she asked.

“I can’t believe I’m saying this, but I think that stuff worked.”

“See? I told you!”

Ryan reached over and picked up the bottle. “What’s in this?”

“It’s a blend. Peppermint, ginger, and fennel. I can’t remember the rest.”

“Whatever is in it, I’m glad Sydney talked you into buying that kit.”

“I know,” she answered. “Me too.”

Sydney’s name brought both of them back to reality and what they were facing.

“We can’t get involved, Ryan,” Cassandra said. “At least not until after I know Sydney is safe.”

Ryan squeezed her hand.

“I know.”

She laid her head on his shoulder and before either of them realized it, they both had fallen asleep.

Hours later, daylight poured through the paned glass of the suite, waking them. Cassandra didn’t know when, but sometime in the night, she and Ryan laid down on the couch, so when she awoke, she was halfway on top of him, her head resting on his chest and his arms protectively holding her.

She didn’t want to get up.

“Good morning,” he said.

“Good morning. How long have you been awake?”

“Not long.”

A sudden knock on the door with the pronouncement of “Breakfast!” made them get up.

“I don’t think I want to see food for a month,” she said.

Ryan checked through the peephole and then opened the door. A cart of fruit, yogurt, croissants, juice and hot coffee was wheeled into the room.

“Thank you,” Ryan said, escorting the man back to the door and locking it behind him.

He lifted the lid of the center tray to find a box with the words, “24 Hours” written across.

“We have a box,” he announced.

Cassandra walked over and noted the shape. “What is it? Wine?”

Carefully Ryan lifted the top to find a bright blue bottle labeled, “Fountain of Youth.”

Cassandra picked it up and looked over it.

“St. Augustine’s Fountain of Youth. Sydney and I went there on a family vacation when we were kids. How far away is it?”

“About two hours.”

“Then I guess we better get started.”

Ryan watched her turn to grab her bag.

“Cassandra.”

She turned to look at him.

“I haven’t wanted to mention this, because I was hoping I wouldn’t have to. I just received an alert on my phone.”

“What is it?”

“Remember when you first arrived at my condo and I grabbed the flashlights?”

“Yes.”

“Remember when I told you I was preparing for hurricane season and that’s why I had everything ready?”

She nodded.

“It’s because there was a hurricane far out in the Atlantic and they encouraged everyone to be prepared in case it headed our way.”

“And?”

“It’s a Category 5 and Florida is in its path.”