

Chapter 1

Sitting in seats 4A and 4B in the first class cabin of flight 1573 heading to Barcelona were Frances and Gordon Wakefield from Quebec. They were celebrating their sixtieth wedding anniversary by taking a four-week cruise on the *Emerald of the Seas*.

Frances was studying her itinerary as Gordon listened to her endless litany. After sixty years of marriage, he had learned the three little words that contributed to their marital bliss, “You’re right, dear.”

“Gordon, I think that as soon as we get to Barcelona, we should take a city tour. I want to see exactly from where Christopher Columbus sailed, and I want to see that pretentious cathedral built by Antonio Gaudé. The word “gaudy” came from that, dear, as I am sure you know. We must see both those places. We’ll just check our luggage at the hotel, change into walking clothes, and schedule an afternoon tour. I think that’s what we should do. What do you think, Gordon?”

“You’re right, dear. We should take an afternoon tour of the city.”

Gordon’s soft, mellow voice was barely perceptible except to Frances, who was used to his unobtrusive manner. It wasn’t that he was meek or browbeaten; it was just that he loved Frances, and anything he could do to make her happy was his ecstasy. He knew it from the first time he met her over sixty-three years ago when he was working for the Canadian railroad and she was taking a trip with her family. He had been a porter at the train station and loaded their luggage. They made immediate eye contact. Those piercing robin-egg blue eyes could melt his soul.

He could still see her with her beautiful light brown hair molded in symmetric waves all over her head. Her hair parted on the left side was perfect. She hadn't changed that part in all these years. Looking at her now seated across from him, she was still the perfect lady. She wore a lacy white blouse with the cameo he had given her shortly after they lost their only child through a miscarriage. It sat perfectly under her wrinkled neck nestled within the flawlessly tied bow of white satin. Her floral skirt still showed a nice waist. God, he got hot just thinking about what was under that skirt.

"Frances, you look so good, I could take you right here," whispered Gordon.

"Now, Gordon you know better than to tease me like that. I've always wanted to be a member of the Mile High Club!" hinted Frances as she casually slipped her hand under the airline blanket Gordon had draped over his lap. She gently reached for his aged sex and kissed his cheek. Frances whispered so only Gordon could hear, "I do think we need to take our love to a higher level, don't you agree? I'm game if you are!"

Actually, Gordon knew better than to challenge Frances like he had. You never knew what she was going to do next. Before he could even give it a thought, she stopped one of the flight attendants who was passing through the aisle.

"Excuse me, dear," stated Frances in the most lady-like manner she could muster. "This is all really quite embarrassing, but my husband has a medical condition which unfortunately requires attention, and I will need to accompany him to the lavatory to assist him."

The flight attendant listened in the utmost professional manner as Frances continued. "I would sincerely appreciate if you could advise any other passengers who might need to use the

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lavatory while I am assisting my husband, that it will be a few minutes. I just want to minimize any inconvenience to the other passengers.”

Gordon kept his head down. The flight attendant most likely thought that he was embarrassed over his medical condition. In reality, he was hiding his face so that she couldn't see his hidden laughter.

Was she really going to go through with this? thought Gordon, amused. Before he could even answer the question to himself, Frances went on. “Come, Gordon. Let me help you up,” emphasizing the word “up.”

As Frances passed by the galley, she put her hand on the flight attendant's shoulder, squeezed it lightly, then smiled innocently, intimating how she appreciated her help and cooperation.

About fifteen minutes later, the door opened, and Frances escorted Gordon back to his seat as if he couldn't find it without her gentle leadership. As they strapped themselves back into their seat belts, Gordon whispered softly, “Oh, Frances, you *are* an original. What did I ever do to deserve a life so rich; a life which has tasted like the best vintage wine and which has been ever-flowing? I swear I love you so!”

Gordon's voice broke slightly as he reached for her thin, wrinkled hands and placed them into his.

“May I get you anything else to drink?” interrupted the flight attendant.

“No, thank you,” answered Gordon. “I think I'll take a little nap just now. I want to be fresh when we arrive in Barcelona. My bride here has a whole afternoon of activities planned; she's a tough one to keep up with.”

“What about you, Mrs. Wakefield?” inquired the flight attendant as she cleared the two empty glasses.

“Well, I don’t see what one more little glass would hurt,” replied Frances.

Frances turned to Gordon. He had already nestled a pillow under his head and reclined the seat into an almost horizontal position, one of the many benefits of first-class international. In addition to the state-of-the-art comfort, first class also offered unlimited liquor, good food and excellent service. For these amenities, however, Gordon and Frances had shelled out over eighty-five hundred dollars in airline tickets. But they could afford it. Gordon was a retired literature professor and Frances was a best-selling novelist. Her thriller/crime novels had earned her not only international acclaim but significantly increased their personal coffers. Her number one best sellers included *The Initiation*, *Lightning Strikes*, *For Better and for Worse*, and *Rip Tide*. This trip, in addition to celebrating their anniversary, was also a chance for Frances to research her latest book, *The Exchange*. Since it would be her last, she was going to make it the best she’d ever written.

Gordon actually loved to read her books, and he loved the process as she wrote them. She consulted him often for input and inspiration. Frequently he made creative suggestions that Frances melded brilliantly into her works.

When she embarked on a new novel, she outlined each chapter extensively. Her characters became family members to Frances and Gordon. They discussed them to exhaustion until Frances heard a bell go off in her head. That was the cue that the character was developed and ready to enter her fictional world.

Gordon was her consultant and confidante, and he knew that this book was something special to Frances. He felt it from the moment she discussed the plot with him. The book’s main

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character, Tomas, was a jewel thief who was planning to steal the largest diamond ever cut. Very few in the world knew of the existence of this rare yellow diamond. Tomas didn't need the money; he just wanted to hold the ultimate jewel in his hand. He was even planning on returning it after a time. Another thrill; possibly even more exciting than the original theft.

It had been Gordon's suggestion that Frances try to interview a real-life jewel thief as part of her research for the book. Gordon had gone on the Internet, and his search led them to a notorious jewel thief presently serving six years in a Florida maximum security prison.



His name was Limo Louey. His M.O. was a work of art. He would find rich widows living in Palm Springs, Chicago, New York, or Beverly Hills who had a penchant for owning and wearing expensive jewelry.

To become a potential victim of Louey's, the widow had to frequently use limousines. After identifying his prospective victim, he would spend months studying the victim's routine. He also obtained extensive information on the jewels the victim wore and to what events she wore them. Then he would have an almost undetectable duplicate of the precious jewels made.

Louey didn't like to think of his robberies as heists but preferred to call them "events." After all, like all other great events, they required precision, planning, and execution. And above all, patience! Most thieves got caught because they became impatient. Not Louey! If one little detail seemed off, he'd postpone the event, sometimes for months. After all, he was a master of his trade. He was Limo Louey: master jewel thief. After eleven years, not one piece of evidence from any of his thefts could be traced back to him.

Once the duplicates were made and the day-to-day routine confirmed, Louey would set a date for the event. He would know the exact route the limo would take on the special day. He would get into his police uniform and fake unmarked police car, and at the exact predetermined spot, he would pull the driver over.

While the driver was bent over searching for his driver's license, Louey would inject him with a drug that rendered him unconscious in seconds. The rich widow seated in the back of the limo would be unaware of what was happening in the front of the car.

Once the driver was unconscious, Louey would knock on the back door of the limo and ask the rich passenger for her identification. While she concentrated on digging out her I.D, she received the same shot as her driver. Louey would then quickly take off his victim's jewels and replace them with the masterpiece fakes. He then stole her purse and everything in it. The contents were irrelevant to him. He would throw away any credit cards and give whatever cash she carried to some homeless bum on the street, then dispose of the purse in a local lake.

When the driver and widow would come to, they would contact the police. They would describe the scene and the rich widow would describe her stolen purse. The detectives that would investigate his crimes never found any evidence linking Louey to the crimes. They were left baffled at the cleverness of his robberies.

This M.O. had made him a millionaire, and he had the admiration of the mob. They became his fence. Jewels that he obtained were quickly taken out of the country and sold on the black market.

Eleven years and not one slip up...until last February when some idiot pharmacist assistant had given him the wrong medication. When he injected the limo driver of his last event,

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instead of dropping off immediately, he looked up at the “cop.” The next thing Louey knew, he was staring at the wrong end of a gun.

The arrest details and M.O. were placed onto the Crime Net, and before long, Louey’s nationwide activities came to a halt. The guilty verdict was rendered in forty-five minutes, and Louey got six years with the possibility of probation in four in a Florida prison. *No problem*, thought Louey. He could certainly conduct plenty of business while serving time.

One day while Louey was strategizing about his next “event” after his expected parole, he walked this little old lady, Frances Wakefield. She wanted to interview him. She was writing some novel about a jewel thief and wanted to “get into his head.”

“Mr. Louey, I really appreciate you agreeing to see me,” Frances said as she situated the tape recorder and her note pad on the old wooden desk.

“It’s just Louey, Doll Face.” He crossed his legs as he lit a cigarette. His prison blues were freshly pressed and neatly tucked in at the waist. He might have been in prison, but he wasn’t going to look like some two-bit hood. His black, slicked back hair was glistening as the sun hit it through the small window in the interview room. He had a way of looking at women that made them feel naked. He could charm the skin off a snake.

“So, you want to know all the secrets of my trade?” Louey asked Frances as he held a cigarette between the second and third fingers on his right hand. He took a deep drag and didn’t exhale for what seemed like minutes.

“Actually, Mr. uh, Louey, I want to know why you decided on this line of work. How did you get started? How did you decide on your particular M.O.? How did you pick certain victims over others?”

“Whoa, slow down, one question at a time. After all, we’re going to be spending weeks together, so you don’t need to get all the answers today. I need to know about you as well and why you’ve decided on me as, should we say, your role model.”

Louey was now standing near the wall where there was a small window. He looked up as if he could really see what was going on outside in the world beyond the prison walls. His posture was erect, as if he still had total control over his actions and his life. He hardly gave the appearance of a criminal, much less that of an incarcerated one.

Louey then turned. His five-foot-nine height was misleading. He looked much taller. By most standards, he was not a bad looking man. Actually, he was handsome in a mysterious sort of way. He had brown, mesmerizing eyes, a faultless complexion, a perfectly maintained graying mustache, and manicured nails. Except for the prison garb, one would have thought he was on his way to an executive board meeting.

He turned to face Frances and moved back towards the badly scarred wooden table that separated her chair from his. “And I want to have your absolute assurance that this tape recorder will be used solely for your very personal purposes. Do I have your word on that?”

“Why, of course, Louey. I am a woman of my word. As I stated in my letters, I will only use information you allow me to reference. Since my character will be, for the most part, based on you and your life, I will try to be as accurate as possible. However, you will have the ultimate say on what I use and what I omit. Deal?” asked Frances as she extended her soft, fragile hand to Louey.

“Deal, Doll Face. I think this will be a mutually rewarding experience for both of us.”

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Frances left the interview feeling excited and intrigued. She couldn't wait to tell Gordon everything. They estimated the interviews would last about four to six weeks, so Gordon and Frances rented a condo in South Florida for a few months. They loved Florida, and the location would give Frances easy access to Louey for their frequent interviews.

As the weeks progressed, Frances was exposed to a new world, the world of high-class thievery. It wasn't some random, clumsy act, at least not the way Louey orchestrated it. For those who made it their profession, it was demanding, calculated and precise. Paradoxically, it was also a game of chance where the stakes were high. You won big or you lost everything.

Frances was fascinated by Louey, and Louey was captivated by Frances. Through the weeks, he gained a genuine respect and fondness for her.

About three weeks into the interviews, which he now termed, visitations, Louey had a brainstorm. He didn't know how the idea came to him, but he really felt like it could work. Since his incarceration over two and a half years ago, he had been planning his "coming out." He was going to be bigger and better than ever. Of course, he was designing a new M.O., but he had hardly touched the surface on his genius as a jewel thief. He wanted to be notorious. And Frances could possibly pave the way for his comeback!

"You want me to do what?"

"Frances, by now I know you have excellent hearing. Don't play little old lady with me. I asked you if you wanted to smuggle some jewels into the country for me. You told me you and your husband are going on a Mediterranean cruise. The ports of call are perfect for what I have in mind."

While Louey was elaborating on the particulars, Frances was still in a stupor. “You want me to be your mule?”

“Frances, you’d be perfect; a well-known author, an old lady on her sixtieth wedding anniversary cruise. Who would ever suspect? And admit it, you’re fascinated by all this. Why just write about thrilling adventures and intrigue? Live it for once! I can tell by the twinkle in your eye that you’re intrigued.”

“Well, I was ‘til you referred to me as an old lady,” she said slyly.

Louey moved around the table, took both of Frances’ hands into his and helped her stand so they were eye-to-eye. “Look me in the face and tell me you’re not interested. I know that you’re at least entertaining the idea.”

“Louey, I’m flattered. It’s just not something I can say yes to without thinking it over. Certainly, I must discuss this with my Gordon. After all, my decision will affect him and his life.”

“This is sounding very much like a yes to me. Gordon will do whatever you want him to do, and you know it. That much I’ve figured out after almost a month in your delightful company.”

The guard signaled that the allotted time was over. Frances told Louey that she would be back next week with her answer. He winked at her and whispered, “I’ll have the first of the details ready. This will be an adventure you’ll never regret, Doll Face. And I guarantee you’ll get a best-seller out this. You have Louey’s word on that.”