

Narrow Escape

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The games of the idle rich

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There was very little light from the crescent moon, and all you could hear was the wind moving the trees a bit and a dog barking in the distance. It was a warm spring night and the fragrance of hyacinths hung heavy in the air.

“ This would go a whole lot smoother if you had just gotten the code,” he whispered.

“ If you think it's always so easy, then maybe you should have stepped up and gotten it, yourself” she said sharply.

“ You're positive there's only this alarm – no motion detector, right?”

“ What kind of an idiot do you think I am? I told you, Gloria said she didn't want the hassle of alarms going off just because the dogs walked into a room.” Her voice sounded more impatient as she asked, “How much longer?”

Beads of sweat formed on his brow. “Almost there....yes. Hand me the wire snippers.”

Amelia handed them to Jonathan. He looked at her with a seriousness she hadn't quite seen before.

“ You do realize that it's in and out. Look at your watch. I'm giving you thirty seconds to get to the library door. I'll cut the wires and then you're only going to have seconds until it registers at the alarm company. You're sure you can get into the safe?”

Amelia smiled, “The fools don't even lock it. All I have to do is pull the handle and it'll open. I dare say there's over fifteen thousand dollars sitting there. I'll grab that and a few of the jewelry boxes I saw. Breaking the glass, unlocking the door, in and out, I can do it in less than a minute and a half. Are you ready?”

He gave her a quick kiss and said in a rushed voice, "Go!"

Amelia raced around the side of the house, her flashlight in her hand. She skirted around the patio furniture and reached the French doors of the library before her allotted time was up. She watched the second hand of her watch tick until it reached thirty-one seconds. Crash, went the glass as she swung her flashlight. She hit the remaining glass out of the way, stuck her gloved hand through the opening and unlocked the door.

Once inside, she turned on her light and made her way over to the Ramon Santiago painting and pulled the right side of it. It opened like a door, revealing a hidden wall safe. Sure enough, Amelia pulled on the handle and it quietly opened. She grabbed the bundled money and shoved it into her duffel bag. Reaching in even farther, she located the black velvet boxes that she suspected contained Gloria's finest jewelry. She dropped the six boxes into her bag, turned, and ran out the door and into the dark night.

Jonathan was waiting for her as she rounded the side of the house. He grabbed Amelia's hand and the two of them raced to the back of the property, through a hole in the hedge and to the silver Porsche around the corner.

Jonathan eased the sports car away from the curb. Within minutes he was five blocks away, and pulling into a curved driveway. A push of a button closed the gates behind them, while he maneuvered the car into the garage, pushing another button and closing the door.

When Amelia got out of the car, she took off her black hoodie and shoved into one of the storage totes, under the work bench. Jonathan followed suit and threw his black shoes and gloves in after hers. He unlocked the door and turned off the alarm to their home. Amelia carried the black duffel bag into the kitchen and turned on the lights.

"Are you hungry? I could use something cold to drink. I don't see why we always have to wear these long sleeved shirts. I swear I lose weight from all the sweating I do," Amelia complained.

Jonathan stared at her, not quite believing what came out of her mouth. "You know damn well how important it is to conceal as much as possible. Jesus, Amelia, do you ever get tired of complaining?"

"It's just that I'm so hot," she whined.

Jonathan walked to where she was leaning against the counter and put his hands on either side of her, pressing against her body.

“ Yes baby, you are definitely hot,” his breath hit the side of her neck as he spoke. “I am always so turned on by you after we do a job.”

Amelia placed her hands on his broad chest and moved them up around his neck. His mouth opened expectantly when she moved her lips to his. Her kiss invited him to explore the pleasures they had celebrated for the past twenty years

Jonathan's hands moved down to his wife's firm breasts. As always, her nipples became as hard as the jewels he worked with every day. He loved the way Amelia's breath caught in the back of her throat and the moan that escaped while she exhaled. He broke their kiss, grabbed the hem of her t-shirt and lifted it over her head. Her breasts strained against the black sports bra she wore.

Amelia damned Jonathan in her mind, when he peeled off her shirt. She threw her arms back around his neck and pulled him closer, placing her knee between his legs. If he wanted to play, so would she, as her leg began to rub between his. His reaction was immediate, and she knew she had found her mark when she heard his low growl in her ear.

Without warning he scooped her up into his arms. Amelia grabbed the duffel bag off the granite counter-top as he carried her out of the kitchen, up the curved mahogany staircase and through the double doors of their bedroom. Unceremoniously, he dumped her on the bed and plopped down next to her. He reached for her, letting her know it would be a long time before he let her go.

She lay on her back, Jonathan's leg between hers, his hand kneading her breast as his lips covered her throat. Up and down, from her ear to her collarbone, he trailed his hot, moist kisses. When he hit that one spot, just behind her ear, the goose bumps rose up on her skin, her back arched and she purred her delight. He left her skin just long enough to sit her up and peel the bra off, over her head. Her breasts bounced as they celebrated their freedom. Jonathan slid off the bed, bent and grabbed the waist band of her black workout pants and pulled them down her legs. He smiled as her nakedness revealed her to be a true platinum blonde.

Amelia moved into the middle of the bed and held out her arms, asking him to join her. He tossed the duffel bag to the end of the bed, quickly stripped out of his clothes and crawled up the length of her body. Her legs spread as he lay down on her and kissed her deeply. She could feel his hard cock nudge her entrance. It made her smile, flattered her, to know that after all these years he still wanted her the way he had when they first met.

Jonathan felt her nails on his back, digging in but not scratching. He kissed her lips, her nose, her eyes, and then started making his way down her luscious body. She was soft, not quite as firm as when they were young, but there wasn't any woman who could ever compare to his Amelia. Her pink

nipples called to him and he latched on, sucking as if he expected to be fed.

He knew he was pleasing her when she ran her fingers through his hair, holding him to her breast. Little mewling sounds filled the silence of their bedroom, along with the sounds his lips made on her nipples. Amelia felt herself start to tingle and grow moist and she pushed his head a bit to urge him to move downwards.

Down her flat belly, Jonathan slowly moved, kissing and licking the whole way. His hands went to her hips and he raised them a bit when he reached her fragrance. She dropped her knees to each side, opening herself to him. He nuzzled the downy soft landing strip that she wore and nipped at her plump lips.

His tongue separated her and dug its way through to her wet core. He never grew tired of her taste. It was delicate and sweet, and he loved the way that with very little effort, he could make her cum. Jonathan flattened his tongue and slid it up her length, from her hole to her little nub, stopping and sucking on her clit. Amelia's body trembled with excitement. This is what was so special about her husband, his need to pleasure her. There were times when he wouldn't even cum, preferring only to satisfy her.

She knew it was coming – he knew where to find it, high and to the left. Once he found his mark, he didn't stop, not even when he pushed his middle finger into her and performed his come hither movement against her G-spot. The first clue Amelia gave Jonathan was her panting and the whispers.

“ No, oh....oh....oh God, baby,” she said softly, her voice becoming very high pitched.

Digging in a little more firmly with his finger, and relentless with his tongue, he was determined to achieve his happy ending. When she placed her hands against his head, raised her hips and tried to slide out of his reach, he knew he had her. Her legs tensed and trembled, she screeched, and his hand was filled with a thin, sweet liquid.

He let her move his head away but he kept his hand inside her. Amelia seemed to melt into the bed, panting, trying to calm. Jonathan stayed still, looking at her intently and smiling. When she seemed to have recovered, he withdrew his hand and got up on his knees. One at a time he took hold of her legs and put them on his shoulders, advancing his cock in to her wet and waiting hole.

There was no need to guide it with his hand, because her body seemed to pull him in. He leaned forward and entered the moist heat. Amelia's eyes widened as her husband bent her in half, pushing his way in until his balls came to rest against her ass. His look was intense but there was a hint of a

smile when he raised his right eyebrow at her and started to move. Rocking harder, in and out, faster then slower, Jonathan used Amelia to stroke his cock. He was already turned on by her squirting, and he knew he wouldn't last long. Damn, he thought, she was so fucking tight.

He watched her eyes close and her mouth form a perfect O, at the same time her muscles started to milk him. He released his heat, shooting deep inside her womb. Amelia's hands pulled at the bed-covers when her orgasm hit. Waves of pleasure washed over the both of them until they finally collapsed, sexually exhausted.

Amelia heard Jonathan's heart start to slow while her head rested on his chest. He moved his hands over her body in a feather-light massage. The only sound in the room was their breathing, with an occasional sigh of pleasure. He moved to place his hand under her chin and lift it, planting a sweet kiss on her lips.

“ You are so precious, baby,” he said quietly. “I love you.”

“ Mi amore,” Amelia whispered back, and then promptly sat up and reached for the bag at the end of the bed. “Let's see what we got.”

Jonathan looked at her, laughing at her child-like enthusiasm for their latest haul. He watched as she unzipped the bag and dumped the contents out over his belly. He sat up and grabbed one of the larger black velvet boxes and opened it. Inside was a fiery red ruby necklace. He lifted it - eighteen inches, platinum settings, round faceted, graduated stones.

“ This is a great piece,” he said, reaching into his nightstand drawer and pulling out a jeweler's loupe. “These stones are as close to perfect as I've ever seen. I can break them down into several pairs of earrings and some pendants – maybe a couple of rings.”

“ Ohhhh, lookee here,” Amelia said, waving a cleared stoned necklace in Jonathan's face. “A diamond tennis necklace, woo hooooo!”

“ Hmmm, sixteen inches, appears to be about ten carats,” he said studying the new find. “And it's completely fake.”

“ What? How dare she? Who the hell puts a fake in a safe, for God's sake?”

“ Someone who is wearing the real one or has no idea that she's been cheated. You said Gloria and her husband were a couple of idiots,” he responded, throwing the necklace on the floor.

Amelia sounded frustrated. "The rest of this stuff had damn well better be real."

The remaining boxes contained a vintage sapphire and diamond ring, a 32.5 carat diamond white gold cuff bracelet, and a three strand pearl necklace with diamond clasp. The last box made the evening worth while because it contained a diamond and emerald necklace that Jonathan estimated was worth in excess of \$250,000.00.

" I can reset these diamonds, no problem. I'm going to have to send the teardrop emeralds to Jurgen. He can get rid of them and the larger rubies in Europe . All in all, a very lucrative night, baby."

Amelia walked over to their desk, pulled out a shipping envelope and started stuffing it with the ill-gotten cash. "I'll get this off tomorrow. I'm also going to contact Nina about that villa outside of Zurich . I'll feel a whole lot better when I'm sure we have a home lined up."

" I think you're starting to get a little paranoid, Amelia," Jonathan said as he put the jewelry boxes into a leather briefcase. "We are flying so far under the radar it isn't funny. What are you worried about?"

" Just how long do you think we can get away with this? At some point in time, someone is going to realize that we're the one thing everyone has in common."

" What makes you think so? We've lived in one of the best neighborhoods in Greenwich for the past ten years. Your grandparent's house is nearly unrecognizable with all the additions and remodeling we've done. We are established here and would never be suspected of being burglars," he said, walking over and putting his arms around Amelia.

" It's just...." Amelia started.

" Shhh," he silenced her. "I told you a long time ago, this is the perfect cover. A wealthy couple where the husband happens to be a jeweler? You know none of my creations even remotely resembles the original pieces. With our contacts in Switzerland , the gems I can't reuse are fenced and the money is deposited in our account over there. Please baby, stop worrying. If you do, I promise I'll finish that diamond fringe necklace for the Smythe's party in two weeks."

Amelia's eyes widened and she smiled. "Really? It's nearly done?"

" A beautiful replica of a Harry Winston piece. When I'm done it'll be worth about half of a million. You can thank our kind neighbors for their contributions."

She took Jonathan's hand and led him to the bed and showed him just how very grateful she could

be.

Amelia was in the sun room arranging lilacs in a Baccarat crystal vase the next morning. It was an unseasonably warm spring day and it felt good to leave the garden door open. The gate buzzer announced Gloria's arrival. Amelia was almost knocked over when the sobbing victim threw herself into her arms.

“ You can't believe how violated I feel,” Gloria said between blotting her eyes and blowing her nose, after she told Amelia about the robbery. “How could anyone do this to us? Us! We have such a good security system and now I feel like anyone could walk in off the street and kill us while we sleep.”

Although a part of her felt very bad for what Gloria was going through, Amelia wasn't sorry for her at all. Gloria and her husband lorded their family wealth over everyone and looked down their noses at anyone they considered nouveau riche. After all, their families came over on the Mayflower and they seemed to feel they were the anointed leaders of the neighborhood. How easily they fall, Amelia thought.

“ I mean, you expected the Abrams, Siegel's and Brownstein's to be robbed. They certainly never took the precautions we did. I don't know who might be next. Maybe the thieves won't come back considering how much they stole from us.”

“ Do you really think that?” Amelia asked while trying to look wide-eyed and innocent.

“ Trust me, they got millions in my jewels alone,” Gloria said in a hushed voice while she continued to confide in Amelia. “Nelson is contacting some people he knows in the federal government. We may even have F.B.I. protection after this.”

Amelia tried not to roll her eyes at how much Gloria estimated her jewels were worth. She did attempt to tune out Gloria's whining, but made note of any information that could help Jonathan and her, in the future. She wasn't sure if Gloria was talking nonsense about bringing in federal investigators. Maybe they should reconsider any additional adventures.

“ But what if she isn't talking nonsense?” Amelia asked while relating her conversation with Gloria, to Jonathan. “This could mean real trouble. We've hit so many homes maybe we should just stop.”

“ We had a plan that we wanted to complete before going to Northampton this summer. Now if you're going to have cold feet, I can do the rest myself. What I do think is that we should not give up on hitting the Carlson's. That was going to be our last job and you know how much we can walk with when we pull it off,” Jonathan replied, looking at his wife's worried expression.

He cupped his wife's face in his hands and looked into her sea green eyes, "I would never want to put you in harm's way. I mean this – if you need to walk away now, then do it. I'll pull off the Carlson's.

He stroked her soft blonde hair as she rested her head on his broad shoulder. She released a sigh and softly said, "No, it's okay. I'll do it."

" Only if you're sure, Amelia."

She lifted her head so he could read the truth on her face. "I don't say things unless I mean them. I'm having lunch with Jeanette on Wednesday and then we're going to the library fund-raiser meeting. I already know where their safe is located. She normally gives the entire staff off, so I should be able to watch her set the alarm on the house. I'll get the code."

It was so much easier than Amelia anticipated. Jeanette asked her to hold her purse while she set the alarm. The numbers were part of the Carlson's telephone number. Another pair of naive people, Amelia thought. As the two women walked towards Amelia's Mercedes, she started asking Jeanette about her security system.

" I've been so terrified lately, what with all the break-ins. You know, sometimes Jonathan will bring work home with him and if we go out at night I keep wondering if anyone is breaking in. I mean, how do you know if you have the right security system?" she asked.

Jeanette nodded and agreed, "Oh my dear, I absolutely understand your unease with everything that has happened. That's why we hired extra security to check the property each night while we're out. And we've been very smart about it, staggering the times they come by. First we have them start at eight o'clock , then at nine. They switch to nine-thirty and then come at ten fifteen . This way the robbers won't be able to figure out when how long they have."

" That's brilliant, Jeanette. I may have Jonathan talk to Paul about the service you use. You can't be too careful, you know," Amelia responded with a small smile on her face.

On the Saturday night of the Lilac Ball at the Smythe's, Amelia's hair and make-up people had left and she was stepping into the deep purple strapless gown. The bodice had a sweetheart neckline, and layers of crepe and chiffon flowed down her body. With her hair worn up and soft, she looked like a Grecian statue. Jonathan came up behind her to help with the zipper. After it was secure, he placed a soft kiss on her bare shoulder and put the cold platinum around her throat. Just as he had promised, her diamond necklace was finished for the party. The jewels' facets reflected the light in the bedroom and made Amelia even more radiant.

“ Oh,” she cried out while he fastened his diamond creation. “Oh God, Jonathan, it's stunning. It's breathtaking! I love it!”

She turned and moved into his arms, kissing him with a passion that had never waned. When his hands dropped to her rounded ass, she moved back and admonished him for his advances.

“ There's time enough for that later, sweetheart, after we're home safe and sound. Now, did you put the bags in the trunk?”

“ You take my breath away, do you know that?” Jonathan asked watching his wife touch up her lipstick. “Yes, we're all set. We'll make sure we go out to the garden precisely at nine-thirty. I'll have the bags hidden in the back of the property before we arrive at the party. We'll be able to slip away and be back before ten-fifteen. No one will miss us.”

Everything went as planned. Jonathan had become an expert at picking locks and had tools specially designed for his hands. Amelia was no slouch when it came to listening to the tumblers on the safes. Tonight was no exception and they filled the duffel bag quickly.

Once the striking couple rejoined the party, their faces flushed with excitement, everyone assumed they had been out in the garden, kissing. They ate, drank and danced until after one, when everyone started to make their way home. Jonathan had just exploded down Amelia's throat when they heard the first siren. They froze, each holding their breath, listening to be sure where the sounds were originating.

When the high-pitched screams faded into the distance, Jonathan reached for the duffel bag and dumped its contents out on the bed. This was by far the largest take of the season. The Carlson's owned several large caret rings, all of which would have to be sent to Jurgen. The diamonds and emeralds would be too hard to reset and sell. There were several watches by Tiffany and Rolex, diamond necklaces and bracelets, including several Tiffany signature items that also needed to leave the country. The more Jonathan thought about it, the more he realized that although they would take a huge cut in the amount of money they would normally collect, these items were too hot to stay here in the U.S.

With all the drinking that went on at the ball, it was no surprise that no one could remember any of the party-goers who were not present at all times. It was also no surprise when detectives, making their way around the neighborhood, ended up at Jonathan and Amelia's house at approximately three o'clock , the afternoon following the ball.

They had seen the two Sheriff's detectives on previous occasions and were quite comfortable being questioned by them. It was the young woman who accompanied them that made Amelia a little uncomfortable. The petite woman wore her long dark hair tied back and looked very professional in her navy pantsuit. When the men identified themselves, she showed her badge and was introduced as an investigator for U.S. Department of State.

While the men asked the standard questions they had on previous visits, Amelia noted the young woman walking slowly around the library, not touching anything, but looking intently at their books, artwork and especially Jonathan's desk.

"Mr. Russell, how much business do you do with overseas vendors?" Ms. Ferguson asked.

Jonathan's brow wrinkled just a little. "Not really very much. I have gem brokers in New York that I've had relationships with for years. I trust them and they've known me long enough to anticipate my needs. Why do you ask?"

"Do you keep any inventory here at the house?" she went on, without answering him.

"There are times I have some pieces with me. Sometimes a friend will be looking for a last minute gift and call me at the shop. I don't have a problem bringing a selection home for them to view. Again, why do you ask?" Jonathan now turned in his chair to look directly at the young investigator.

"I'm just curious. Aren't you at all nervous about all the break-in's that have plagued your neighborhood?" Ms. Ferguson seemed to be addressing both Jonathan and Amelia, now.

"Very much so," Amelia answered. "My husband recently spoke with one of our friends about the added security they're using. I've also asked him to try not to bring items home over the weekend."

"Mrs. Russell, these break-in's don't just happen on the weekend, you know," one of the detectives spoke up.

"Oh, I know, but that's when most of the neighbors seem to want to see the pieces from Jonathan's shop. I don't know why it's so hard for them to drive into the city and look at them there."

The interview went on for about forty-five minutes. They were asked about the attendees to the ball, who they spent the most time with, and any unusual behavior they may have noticed. Except for Ms. Ferguson's questions, it was similar to the other meetings held after some of the other burglaries. Amelia was still very relieved to see them drive away downed the curved drive.

“ I don't like her,” Amelia sniffed. “She seemed to look down her nose at us.”

“ I think you're imagining things, baby, but I also think that we have to solidify our cover. It's time for us to be robbed.”

Amelia looked at her husband and raised her eyebrows, pretending to be shocked. “Should I prepare a shipment to Jurgen, for safe-keeping?”

“ Come on,” Jonathan held out his hand. “Let's go up and look in the safe. If you don't want your new necklace taken, you'd better make sure wherever we're going on the night of the robbery, you have an opportunity to wear it.”

Two weeks later, while attending a performance of the Vienna Waltzes at the New York City Ballet, Jonathan received a telephone call reporting that there appeared to be a break-in at their Greenwich home and to please return immediately. Amelia acted dutifully shocked, and they left their city friends to head home. During the drive, they chatted about the security arrangements they had made, a company who would check on their estate, starting at eight o'clock that evening. When the Russells left for dinner and the ballet, they left their home, already victims of robbers.

Jonathan and Amelia were greeted by the red flashing lights of the police cars. Jonathan ordered Amelia to stay in the car as he raced towards the house. Several uniformed police officers stopped him and made him wait until the Sheriff's detectives could come out and speak with him. Amelia could see him motioning towards the car, her cue to wipe her eyes with a tissue. As they walked towards her, she got out of the car and ran to Jonathan.

While she trembled in her husband's arms, she could hear the men discussing how this robbery seemed to mirror the others. They were dusting for fingerprints and as soon as they were done, they would need the couple to take an inventory of their missing items. Jonathan mentioned he was glad he hadn't brought anything home from the shop.

One sheriff stood near Jonathan as he started going through the safe, and the other sat by Amelia as she went through her jewelry box.

“ Nana's diamond brooch,” she exclaimed and started to cry. “I know it's nothing compared to what others may have lost, but it was my grandmother's.”

The list Jonathan compiled wasn't very long and he made sure that the cost of their items fell below some of their neighbor's losses. He knew not to draw attention by overly exaggerating what was “stolen” from them. It was almost midnight when everyone had gone and the couple was left in

silence. Amelia smiled as she crawled onto Jonathan's lap.

“ Very nice, Mr. Russell,” she said kissing him. “I don't think anyone would doubt that we weren't robbed by the same people that went after all of our friends. It's just horrible being stuck with the mess from the fingerprint dusting, though.”

“ Thank you, Mrs. Russell. We'll have the service come in tomorrow and clean it up. Nice tears, by the way – you almost made me believe you were upset. If you really are that good of an actress, should I be concerned that sometimes you might be faking it in bed?”

Amelia giggled and moved around on his lap, rubbing his manhood. “Do you really have doubts about me?” By the time they fell asleep, he had no doubts.

Amelia was on the telephone, speaking with Jeanette, telling her about their experience. “Jeanette, I can't believe so many of us have been victims. Maybe we should all meet and discuss how we can prevent this from happening to anyone else.”

“ I asked Ms. Ferguson that very question, this morning,” Jeanette replied.

Amelia swallowed hard and tried to remain calm, “This morning? Oh, was she at your house?”

“ Of course, dear,” Jeanette said. “It was like some of the other robberies. The Sheriff's detectives and Ms. Ferguson were all here. When they left, I heard them say they were going to talk to Gloria and Nelson. Mark my words; it's only a matter of time before they make an arrest. I could tell they're on to something.”

“ But what? Do you have any idea?”

“ No, but it was the way Ms. Ferguson looked. There was something in her eyes.”

When Jonathan came home from the store, Amelia was pacing around like a wild cat. She grabbed his arm and dragged him out to the garden, away from any ears from the staff cleaning the house.

“ They know – don't ask me how, but they know,” the words rushed out of her mouth.

“ What are you talking about? Who?” he asked.

Amelia repeated the conversation she had with Jeanette. Jonathan could see the panic starting to set in. He pulled her close and tried to calm her, but nothing worked. Not the words, not his arms,

nothing. Finally, she began to cry.

“ I need to get out of here, baby. We need to leave and leave soon,” the words seemed to come out in hiccups. “I'm scared. I want to leave before we're arrested. Please baby, please. Let's leave now.”

She never thought he would agree, and she was shocked into silence when he said, “All right. Give me a couple of days to put a rush on the passports and get the tickets. We'll have to go into New York tomorrow to have the pictures taken. I'll need to transfer some more funds and get some cash. It's not going to happen overnight, Amelia, but I will take you away from here.”

On Monday morning, Jonathan cleared his schedule and stopped in his shop to give some instructions to his associates. Then he and Amelia drove back into New York . There was shopping to be done and a stop to see a make-up artist who had worked on some fashion shows that Amelia had attended. Pictures, paperwork, passports, banking, they finished and arrive back at home after dark.

The couple pulled luggage out of storage and carefully packed their new clothes. Other items were packed into shipping boxes and addressed to Jurgen. Amelia walked through her closet, running her hand over her clothing, knowing she would never see most of these items, again. This was her home, her grandparent's home, and soon it would belong to someone else.

“ But I know they did it,” Stacey Ferguson said, trying to convince the Sheriff's she had been forced to work with.

“ You know – but do you have proof? No, you don't. We don't. But if we keep watching and waiting, it will come,” Sheriff Davis replied. “This couple is good, but they aren't perfect. We've got some of the jewelry from his shop being studied to see if we can tie any of the stones into some of the jobs. It might take a week or two, but we'll get them.”

“ Weeks? We don't have that long! Trust me, this couple is going to skip,” Stacey was exasperated as she spoke.

“ And just what can we do about it? We can't arrest them without proof,” he countered.

“ Well, one thing is for sure, I'm not going to lose them. I'm going to be so close to them, they'll think I'm their shadow.”

Amelia and Jeanette left the library, after making the final arrangements for the spring fund-raiser. It was going to be a lavish affair, fine dining, classical music, but one Amelia knew she would miss. As they walked to Amelia's Mercedes, Amelia thought she saw a familiar dark-haired woman walk into

the shop across the street. The hairs on her arms stood up with the uneasy feeling that came over her. Amelia knew instantly, it was Ms. Ferguson watching her.

While Inspector Ferguson was watching Amelia Russell, the shipping boxes Jonathan brought to his shop were being picked up by UPS and soon on their way to Jurgen, in Switzerland . He also contacted Nina and finalized the purchase of the villa that had caught Amelia's eye. Thank goodness for his contacts over there, he thought. Everything was going according to plan. Now, if they could just get out of the country.

Saturday night, the Russell's went to a Broadway show and then to a late dinner at Tao. Amelia was enjoying her soy gingered salmon while Jonathan dined on wasabi crusted filet. He glanced up at a passerby and then set his fork down.

“ Excuse me for a moment, baby; I'll be right back.” Jonathan said, making his way to the rest rooms.

This was one of Amelia's favorite restaurants and she was never disappointed by the cuisine. She froze as she went to sip her saketini. At a table across the room from their curved booth, sat Ms. Ferguson. The glass in Amelia's hand started to shake when the inspector raised her glass in a toast to Amelia.

Jonathan could see that his wife was upset, as he returned to the table. He followed her gaze to the table occupied by a brunette woman, who seemed to be intent on watching his wife. When he sat down he put his hand on his wife's arm, and looked into her eyes.

“ You can relax, baby,” he said. “It's all okay now. We'll be able to leave and no one will know until it's too late.”

Stacey Ferguson parked across the driveway to the Russell's home. They had pulled their car into the garage, and immediately went up to their bedroom, located in the rear of the house. Jonathan didn't mention that Ms. Ferguson's car was never very far behind theirs. One thing he did know was that she couldn't watch them twenty-four hours a day.

“ Honey, I need your help here and I need you to be very gentle,” he said as he took off his suit coat, removed his tie and started to unbutton his shirt.

Amelia's jaw dropped when she saw her husband's torso wrapped in tape. “What the...?”

“ It was the only way I could think to carry all these documents without my pockets bulging. Now help me,” he said.

The removed the tape without causing too much pain and put the documents on the bed. Together they carefully inspected the passports, driver's licenses, cruise ship tickets, birth certificates, and currency. Amelia picked up two cell phones from the middle of the documents and held them out to Jonathan, with a quizzical look on her face.

“ This is the only way you and I will communicate with anyone involved. They belong to a friend and we can toss them away when we're safely out to sea. Monday morning, this will all be behind us.”

Amelia crawled into Jonathan's arms and let his confidence and love wash over her. She knew that if even one thing went wrong, they would probably spend the rest of their lives in prison.

Sunday morning a caterer's truck pulled into the Russell's estate. The sound of the gates opening woke Stacey, who was still parked on the road. She got out of her car and walked over to look up the drive. She could see tables, chairs and boxes being unloaded. This might be a party the Russell's would never forget, she thought.

Amelia had just finished Jonathan's makeup and she was putting the finishing touches on her own. She only had to fix her wig and they would be ready to go. Jonathan had taken their two suitcases down stairs, to be put in the back of the van. She fastened her grandmother's pearls around her neck, grabbed the cream colored handbag, and joined Jonathan in the kitchen.

Jonathan almost didn't recognize his beautiful wife. The makeup was outstanding, the wigs were very realistic. With the right props, no one would ever guess who they were. He took her hand and led Amelia out through the garage and into the back of the van. They would spend the night in the city and board the Royal Caribbean cruise ship to Haifa , Israel , tomorrow.

Once they left the ship in Israel , they would change identities, collect the Mercedes SUV he had purchased, and drive the 1700 miles to Zurich , to begin their new lives. As long as they kept their new identities to themselves, there would be no way to trace them.

It had been entirely too quiet at the Russell's and when no one answered her continual attempts to call or gain access, she convinced the sheriff's department to call in some favors and get a judge to issue a search warrant on a Sunday. The front gate was opened and when they reached the front door, they found it unlocked.

The empty house was almost too quiet. Stacey's nerves were on edge. There were just enough personal items to make it seem like nothing was amiss, but at the same time, there was just enough missing to make a good investigator question whether or not the couple was gone. For Stacey, the

deciding factor was the lack of personal items in the bathroom. In her mind, the Russell's had packed and gotten away. The question was where, and how.

“ Could you please arrange for a limo to take us to the dock tomorrow? Our cruise to the homeland leaves early and we don't want to be late,” Mrs. Adler asked the front desk clerk at the hotel.

“ Of course, ma'am. Our courtesy shuttle will take you there. I have your wake-up call arranged. We'll make sure you're there in plenty of time. The bellman will take your bags and help you to your room. May I have someone assist you with your husband's wheelchair?”

“ That's very kind of you,” the older woman replied, “but Sol doesn't trust just anyone. I'll be just fine if I can get help with our bags.”

After the bellman left, Jonathan jumped out of the wheelchair, picked Amelia up and spun her around.

“ Brilliant!” he cried. “No one suspected anything! Your idea for this makeup was wonderful!”

The two fell on the bed laughing, whispering and cuddling. Fern and Sol Adler, an elderly Jewish couple, would board the Mariner of the Seas cruise ship tomorrow. When they reached Israel , they would leave the ship for a supposed excursion. They would never return. In a couple of days, Joachim and Katrina Mueller would make their way to Zurich , to move into their new villa, beginning their new lives.

Fern's hands gripped the handles of Sol's wheelchair just a little harder when she saw Inspector Ferguson sitting off to the side of the long glass walkway. Stacey was immediately recognizable, in spite of her civilian dress. She slowed her step a little and Sol dropped his head, pretending to doze, but watched the inspector through slitted eyes.

Stacey was concentrating hard on trying to find the forty-something wealthy couple that may have decided to escape by taking a cruise. Airport security personnel were on the lookout, the train station was covered, but still she had a feeling the Russell's would take an unexpected escape route. She wondered if the couple who had just passed could have been Jonathan and Amelia, with their hair dyed, but decided otherwise. She never really paid attention as the Adler's walked by.