

Excerpt from *Crewel Intentions*
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“Anastasia, I need your help.”

I recognized the voice at once. “Erica? You shouldn’t be calling me.”

“I had to. I don’t know where else to turn.”

“Hold on.” I poked my head out of my cubicle and found the hall empty. Quickly I darted down the corridor to the models’ closet, a walk-in storage area where I kept arts and crafts supplies and models from past magazine issues.

Once inside, with the door closed and keeping my voice to a whisper, I said, “Are you crazy? You’ll get kicked out of the program.” Although I had gleaned my knowledge of WitSec one hundred percent from a now-canceled TV show, I assumed breaking the *No Contact With Anyone From Your Past* rule was definitely grounds for expulsion.

“I’ve taken precautions.”

“What kind of precautions?”

“I’m on a burner phone. No one will know.”

Erica Milano, former *American Woman* fashion editor and daughter of crime boss Joey Milano, now lived under an assumed name in an undisclosed city, compliments of Witness Protection. Several months ago, she’d provided a federal prosecutor with evidence against her ex-boyfriend after he tried to kill me. Attempted murder was only one of the many crimes that permanently relocated Ricardo to a federally run establishment with bars on the windows and razor wire landscaping.

In addition, Joey Milano now awaited trial on more than two dozen counts. Thanks to Erica, the feds had enough information to cripple her father’s organization and put him in standard-issue neon-orange jumpsuits for the rest of his life—unless his goons got to her before she testified against him.

“I really shouldn’t be talking to you, Erica. For your safety and my own.” This call not only put her in jeopardy, but might also lead to a couple of Neanderthals with baseball bats showing up at my front door. And they wouldn’t be asking directions to Yankee Stadium.

She panicked, her voice trembling as she sniffed back tears. “P...please don’t hang up, Anastasia.”

I caved. After all, Erica had played a major role in saving my life. I owed her. “What’s going on?”

“I need to see you. Can we meet?”

“Is that such a good idea?”

“I’ll make sure no one finds out. You’re the only person I can trust.”

“What about the U.S. Marshals? Aren’t they supposed to protect you?”

“If I tell them what’s going on, they’ll relocate me.”

“So?”

“I can’t leave.”

“Why not?”

“I’ve met someone.”

Translation: *I have a new boyfriend.* “Won’t they relocate him with you?” Again, my source of knowledge was totally television-based.

“He wouldn’t be able to move with me.”

“Why not?”

“It’s complicated.”

Isn’t everything? I sighed. “I don’t think meeting with you is a good idea, Erica.”

“I’ll pay you.”

Bull’s eye. Erica knew all about Karl Pollack, my not-so-dearly departed husband, leaving me in debt that rivaled the gross national product of many a small third-world nation. Ricardo had been Karl’s bookie, a fact I learned only after Karl dropped dead at a roulette table in Las Vegas when I naively believed he was at a sales meeting in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Since then, my life has been reduced to scrounging for whatever additional money I can earn to supplement my paltry craft editor’s salary.

“Three thousand dollars,” she added.

A sum much too large to pass up, even though I had no clue what she needed from me. Too many bill collectors had me on speed dial, and every day my sons inched closer to college. Right now I couldn’t even afford to send them to the local community college. Hoping I didn’t regret whatever I was about to dive blindly into, I said, “Okay, where do you want to meet?”

“First, swear you won’t tell anyone.”

Was she kidding? “Of course, I won’t tell anyone. You shouldn’t even be telling me where you are.”

A huge heave of relief made its way through the phone line. "Thank you. I knew I could depend on you. I sent you a plane ticket."

"You were pretty sure of yourself. What if I turned you down?"

"I knew you wouldn't."

"And why is that?"

"I saved your life."