

Book 2 of a series

# R U N F O R T H E M O N E Y

R O B I N D E E

A spine-chilling romantic thriller

# **RUN FOR THE MONEY**

**Robin Dee**

All characters in this book are entirely fictional, and any resemblance to real characters, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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## CHAPTER 1

Carla was 19 years old. Carla was every boy's dream – golden skin, petite but beautifully proportioned, beautiful teeth and a cheeky smile, bubbly personality and a fun girl to be with. She kept her hair in an urchin cut as it was easy to manage, and it was bleached blonde with the sun, giving her the appearance of a beach tomboy. Her regular attire was ragged cut-off jeans and either a flimsy halter top or tee shirt. It was warm in the South of France, and she had an image to maintain. She was carefree, smiled and said hello to everyone she met, and considered herself lucky to live in such a beautiful place with beautiful people and beautiful weather.

Carla lived with her grandmother, Mimi, and was brought up by her and her father who was a fisherman, and who had died 10 years previously in an accident at sea. She had never really got over that terrible day, and although her exuberance appeared to be natural, it was her way of dealing with the tragedy by wiping out the bad bits and remembering the good bits. She never knew her mother, and never knew the reason why. It was never talked about. Carla and Mimi were very poor and just managed to live on a day-to-day basis in a run-down rented apartment in a back street of Sainte-Maxime in the South of France. The landlord kept increasing the rent and Carla kept having to get extra shifts at the corner mini-market where she worked just to pay for the basics. There was never enough money to pay for luxuries. Her wages from the market would never cover the cost after the rent and food was paid for.

Carla got home from her job on a Friday night and gave her grandma a hello kiss. "Carla, my love, there is something I have to tell you," she said. "I had a visit today from the owner of the Haven Retirement Home and they have found me a place under the benevolent trust grant which I qualify for. I can move in next Friday." This came as a shock to Carla. She knew her grandma wanted to go into a residential care home as she was finding it increasingly difficult to manage on her own when Carla was at work. She had fallen a couple of times, the last time ending up in hospital. She couldn't continue like this. It was only a matter of time until there was another serious fall or a scalding. She already had a few near misses.

Carla spent the next week at work in a state of semi-shock. Her world had been turned upside down. She had no right of tenure on her grandma's house so she would be homeless. She could never afford a place of her own. Her colleague at work, Claudette, had said she could stay with her until she found somewhere, but it would only be temporary.

She got home at 9 pm on the following Friday night to an empty house. Her grandma had gone to the home that day for good. Carla sat down in her grandma's chair and cried. She dried her eyes and looked around the room. Then she spotted a note on the

coffee table. It was from grandma. She read it with difficulty through the tears. Her grandma had asked her to clear out the house, and keep anything she wanted. The only thing of her grandma's that she ever wanted was a beautiful 1920s costume necklace which she had always admired, featuring a jet black chain decorated with red beads and a filigree accent that held a faceted red teardrop stone. She went into her grandma's bedroom and saw that all of her clothes and personal possessions had been removed. All except for her jewellery box on the dressing table. She stood for a long time looking at it, then slowly opened the ornate lid. The box itself was a work of art with polished inlaid panelling inset with mother of pearl. As soon as she raised the lid, she saw it. There, right in front of her, was the necklace. Not only the necklace, but also a pair of matching earrings which she had forgotten about. There was also a note. It said, "*For you my darling. Please take them and the box. I will be so happy to know you are wearing them.*" She put them on and stood in front of the mirror for half an hour, and then it was time for bed. She knew she wouldn't sleep.

The next morning she woke up, made some coffee, and thought to herself that she must go out and try to get her life sorted out. After showering and dressing, she just had to put on the necklace and earrings. *Maybe they will bring me luck*, she thought. She bought a local newspaper from the stall down the street to study the accommodation to let, and started to walk down to the harbour to read it. She spotted a good friend of hers, Paul, who ran boat trips to St Tropez across the bay.

"Going across?" he shouted to her, and gave her a wolf whistle!

"Might as well," she answered, "nothing else to do." She climbed into the boat, and they waited for other passengers while Paul approached every tourist walking past and tried to get them to take the trip. After 30 minutes, they had 12 passengers and they set off. It was quite a fast boat, and the ride was always thrilling. Sometimes Paul would let her drive it, which was not strictly legal under his licence, but hey – this was the South of France! She took the wheel, and she couldn't help noticing the male passengers staring at her. She hoped it was in admiration and not fright, and then she realised they were staring at her carefree Bohemian appearance. It made her feel good.

When they reached St Tropez, Carla got out of the boat and made her way up the jetty. She decided to go to the local open-air market and buy some fresh fruit and a can of juice, and then go around the harbour looking at the millionaires' yachts while eating her lunch. And the admiring glances she got from lots of people gave her a huge boost. *Maybe life's not so bad after all*, she thought. She sat down on a bollard beside a particularly opulent-looking motor yacht some people might call a gin palace, and thought, *what would I give for a trip on that!* She opened her bag of fruit, pulled the tag from the can of juice which exploded all over her with a loud whoosh because of the heat, and she let out a loud squeal and dropped everything, the pieces of fruit flying away from her. Then, the most amazing thing happened...

## CHAPTER 2

Carla just sat there, looking on in horror, as her rosy red apple flew through the air and landed with a loud splash into the harbour, and at the same time her tray of fresh strawberries erupted like a volcano from her lap with each one of the luscious fruits choosing its own trajectory, either to follow the apple or to splat like a burst balloon on the hard ground. To complete the floor show, her beautiful soft peach gently rolled off her lap onto the ground, and ever so gently found the lowest possible route culminating in a drainage channel leading directly to the sheer drop into the harbour. She made a last minute dive to retrieve it, but lost sight of it as it disappeared in slow motion over the edge, closely followed by the orange juice escaping from the can which was rolling on its side. The peach's fate was confirmed when she heard the splash as it hit the water. "Merde!" she shouted at the top of her voice, throwing her arms into the air. She quickly followed it with "Bordel de merde!" Her heart was beating hard and she tried to console herself. She started to cry. Some passers-by looked at her, but no one offered to help her. She was just about to leave when she glanced up at the boat she was sitting next to. It was moored stern-in to the jetty and she read the name on its transom - Gravita Z-Ro, Sanremo. Some people were lunching on the aft deck, and one of them, a very good looking man, had left the party and had been leaning on the rail watching all of Carla's mishaps. When she looked up at him, he smiled.

"OK," she shouted, "Laugh, why don't you. I'm sure you found that very funny. Go on, laugh at other people's misfortunes, sitting up there on your big posh yacht, you think you're smart don't you?" The man seemed taken aback by her outburst, and he made towards the gangway from the boat and walked down it towards her. Carla got frightened and started to hurry away.

He shouted after her, "Please, wait, please. I was not laughing at you. Please let me explain. Stop. Don't go." She stopped, turned around, and found she was facing the most handsome, amazing man she had ever seen. She also thought he looked a bit familiar. He looked straight at her and thought she was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen, and he knew she was the girl he had seen before in the mini-market at Sainte-Maxime when he was over there the other day getting supplies for the boat's larder. He never forgot beautiful girls. He was in the fashion business. He was the first to speak.

"Please let me explain. I am Lorenzo Agastini, and I saw you a few days ago at the mini-market in Sainte-Maxime. You served me. I didn't know if you were the same girl as you now have different clothes on, and if I may say so, very beautiful ones. Have you heard of Gravita Z-Ro?"

Carla thought for a second, and then said, "Yes. I have seen advertisements for their jewellery in expensive glossy magazines."

Lorenzo continued, "Good. It is my company. I own it. We are the premium manufacturers of superlative Italian designer costume jewellery in the world. We are at the forefront of contemporary fashion. I was just so delighted to see you sitting beside my yacht and then realising it was really you from the shop. Then when I saw your

necklace I couldn't believe it. These 1920s styles are going to come back, and we are currently designing a new period range for the next season. If I'm not mistaken, what you are wearing looks like a genuine Coco Chanel piece. How did you manage to get it?"

Carla didn't want to tell him the truth, so she just said, "Oh, they are a vintage set I acquired some time ago."

"You are very bold, wearing something so valuable to just walk about," Lorenzo said, "and can I say they suit you exceptionally well. Absolutely beautiful! But then so are you." Carla felt herself turn red. She wasn't used to compliments from magnificent men like this.

Then Lorenzo said, "I see you were having a little trouble with your lunch? Would you like to come aboard and share some of ours? We have plenty to go round. Please," and he ushered her towards the gangway.

They walked aboard the yacht, and Carla was absolutely stunned by the grandeur of it all. Every surface was shiny pristine white, and all of the metalwork was sparkling. She took a glass of champagne offered by a steward, and then sat down to a lunch of smoked salmon, caviar, and even fresh fruit which Lorenzo made a big joke about referring to her 'flying fruit', and then had to apologise when Carla scowled at him. They talked about anything and everything. Lorenzo told her how he had inherited his father's jewellery business, and then built it up into the top designer brand of the costume jewellery market. He showed her around the yacht which he described as his 'plaything', and then went into great detail about the helicopter he was negotiating to purchase from a millionaire in Cannes who had fallen on hard times. This was the purpose of this trip.

They returned to the sun deck, and Lorenzo indicated a lounge for Carla to sit on. He sat beside her, never taking his eyes off her necklace, and offered her a cigarette from a gold cigarette box on the small table. She accepted, and he took one also. As they sat back to relax in the sun, Lorenzo launched into a long speech.

"My dear, I am completely enthralled by your necklace and earrings. And your vintage glasses too. I have to admit to being hugely impressed at you being able to wear such outstandingly beautiful jewellery and carry it off so well with a Bohemian look. You make a very bold statement which says – This is me, this is how I am, accept me or die!" With the last word, he shaped his hand like a gun, pointed it at her and went 'Pouffff!' "You, my dear, are making the statement that we want to encompass for next year's marketing strategy. Have you ever noticed in magazine advertisements for jewellery that all the models are always just that - professional models detached from the ordinary girl on the street? It's true. Not one of them would even dare to be seen in glasses, which are now one of the biggest fashion statements around. It's a travesty of , of.... of...." he searched for the right word.

"Truth?" Carla offered.

"Yes. Yes, truth," Lorenzo continued. "For our next campaign, we are going to show ordinary girls modelling our products. Exactly like you. There will be working girls, tomboy girls, sporting girls – all the real deal - just like you. And to find one who

can carry it off, is the icing on the cake. You will see why in a minute." And then he made an extraordinary proposition to Carla.



## CHAPTER 3

“I would like you to be the public face of Gravita Z-Ro for next year.” Lorenzo suddenly hit her with this statement after studying her face for fully two minutes in silence.

“Huh?” Carla muttered, leaning her head to one side in a quizzical gesture.

“That’s right,” he continued, “I would love for you to front all of our marketing for the next year at the very least. Could you do that? Your face would appear in all of our advertisements in the top glossy magazines, you would be in all of the TV and cinema commercials, your beautiful smile would grace every advertising hoarding from Tulsa to Timbuktu. You are exactly what I’ve been looking for – beautiful, vivacious, striking, terrific attitude, a bit of a tomboy, and with a definite rebel streak. You are a marketing consultant’s gift from heaven. And best of all, you are genuinely, seriously, unique. What do you say?”

Carla thought for a minute. “I already have a job. I wouldn’t want to risk losing it. I couldn’t afford to. And I couldn’t do all that stuff. No, I’m not what you want.”

“You are exactly what I want,” Lorenzo continued, with a hurt look on his face. “You are exactly what I need, my dear. Let me answer your concerns. This will be a proper job. You will get a very good salary, probably about ten times what you earn at present, so you CAN afford to. And of course you can do all that stuff – just act naturally because you ARE a natural, my love. Will you let me do some trial shots to prove it? Just for fun?”

“OK”, Carla said, “it can’t do any harm.” Lorenzo got his camera out, and then started taking shots of Carla smiling, frowning, teasing with her tongue licking her lips, then with her looking naughtily over her glasses, and finally with her holding her glasses and sucking the leg in pensive mood.

“Wonderful, wonderful,” Lorenzo shouted, like an excited little boy. Now, can you tell me what you are wearing under your top and shorts?”

Alarm bells started ringing in Carla’s head, and she asked “Why?”

“We will also need a certain amount of sexual content, but don’t worry my pretty, it is in the best possible taste and fully under artistic licence,” explained Lorenzo.

“I have on a bikini – nothing else,” Carla said. This was her standard summer wear as she was sure to end up on a beach somewhere before the day was over.

“Excellent, excellent,” Lorenzo shouted, clapping his hands like the little boy again. “Please take off your shorts and top.”

Carla did as he asked, and he started snapping her in automatic mode like a demon possessed. He really knew what he was doing. He taunted her, teased her, encouraged her, played with her, and unashamedly flirted with her as she posed on the deck, leaned on the rail, sat on a bollard and pouted at the camera, wrapped her leg sexily around a rope, all of the time an absolute beauty in a bikini.

Lorenzo was seriously impressed by this girl and her seemingly natural antics. “I think we have definitely found ‘The Face of Gravita Z-Ro’ for next year. You will do it?”

Please say yes. PLEASE!”

“OK, I will,” she said. It had to be an improvement on her current situation.

They sat down and talked a bit more over a glass of wine. Lorenzo asked if she was free to start immediately, and she said more or less. She would have to go home for her clothes and personal stuff, tell her employer that she was taking two weeks vacation as she didn't want to resign just yet until she was sure this was for her, and most importantly visit her grandma and tell her the news. Lorenzo told her she would have free use of the company guest villa they had in Sanremo. They made arrangements to meet up at the jetty the following morning, and then the boat would leave for Sanremo. Carla went back to the jetty which Paul used and waited for him to arrive. All of the way home in his boat she couldn't stop talking about her new adventure. Paul listened and seemed genuinely excited for her.

“Only one trouble,” he said, “I won't be seeing so much of you,” and he frowned like a little spoilt child.

“You will,” she immediately replied, “I will make sure of that.”

Over the next few weeks, Carla was treated like a film star. She moved into the company villa. She worked out daily in an elite fitness and beauty club which the company owned, and best of all, the first thing she did was attend the in-house design centre. Then she was presented with a selection of around 50 pieces of jewellery from the new season's collection, and told to pick 25 of her choice which she could use daily, and the rest would be kept for use in photo shoots. She chose a varied selection of pieces which she totally fell in love with. Carla thought all of her Christmases had come at once!

Carla also kept in touch with her friends Paul, and Claudette from the shop. By now, she had officially resigned from her job in the market. One day, Lorenzo told her they were going in the yacht to a remote uninhabited island not too far from St Tropez, to do some photo shoots in front of the amazing rock formations on its shoreline. Carla was to take all of the jewellery in 3 aluminium flight cases, and told to guard them with her life. She phoned Paul to tell him where she was going, and he said he would come out in his boat on the way back from St Tropez to see her. She was really looking forward to seeing him again.

They set off at a fast pace to the island, and Carla sunbathed on the deck. She had on a pair of large black plastic framed prescription sunglasses which Lorenzo had paid for. He came up to her as they approached the island and said, “I'm worried you are getting too much sun my dear. Why don't you go below deck and put on more cream, have a rest and a cool drink? I will call you when I need you.”

Carla thought for a minute, and said, “No, I'm OK. I'll stay here.”

Lorenzo looked her straight in the eye, and said, “You misunderstand me, my dear. You WILL go down below deck and stay there until I call you. Do you understand?” She was

immediately frightened. She had never seen him like that before. He was menacing. He had a dangerous glint in his eye. She did as she was told.

She eventually felt the boat slow down, and waited to be called. She waited, and waited. Then she heard another boat approach. It pulled alongside, and she heard voices, but couldn't make out what was being said. She tried to squint through the window, with her face hard against the glass. She saw a man, a woman and a child being helped aboard Lorenzo's yacht, some shouts, and then the boat left. At that point Lorenzo came into her suite with a flight case in his hand. He put it beside the other three flight cases containing the jewellery and said, "Another consignment my dear. Take good care of it. Now, wait here until I call you."

Carla sat still, sipped at her drink, and then heard the noise. It was another boat. This one had a very loud powerful engine. It pulled up quite suddenly alongside the yacht, and the wash from its wake rocked the yacht. Then Carla heard the loudhailer. "Attention, attention Gravita Z-Ro. This is the police. You are under arrest. I repeat, you are under arrest. We have a gun trained on you, do not try anything. Remove your keys from the ignition as we come alongside, and throw them to us. Prepare yourself for a boarding and stand against the railing facing the sea with your hands behind your heads. All of you. We are coming aboard." Carla froze. Through the window she could see the police launch and an officer on the bow with what looked like a sub machine gun trained on the yacht. She grabbed her phone and dialled a number.

## CHAPTER 4

This was bad. This was very bad. Carla had dialled Paul's number on her phone and it had gone straight to voice mail. She left a message – "Paul. PAUL. Call me back immediately when you get this. Help me Paul, help me, please. I'm in big trouble." She was shaking like a leaf, and she took repeated deep breaths to try to stay calm and in control. An inner voice told her to lock the door, so she did. She looked out of the window again. Two policemen were escorting the family who had just joined the boat over onto the police launch, and they seemed to be treating them quite harshly. The family were of North African appearance. The mother turned around to see where her son was, and the policeman took hold of her head, wrenched it back into a straight-ahead position and pushed it forward so hard that she stumbled and fell. He didn't even help her to get up, but just shouted at her. Carla noticed that the boy seemed terrified and was shaking like a leaf. Then she saw Lorenzo produce papers for the policeman in charge to inspect. There seemed to be a heated argument going on over their content.

Carla was totally distraught. She had no idea what to do. She remembered her grandma's old saying 'If something seems too good to be true, then it usually is.' She was right. Something was seriously wrong here. She slipped the sunglasses off, put them in their case, dropped them into one of the flight cases and got out her own old glasses to wear. Then she heard footsteps coming down the staircase, and loud voices. "Police. Anyone here? Come out now. This is the police." And they banged on all of the doors as they shouted. Carla's heart almost stopped when she saw the door handle move, and she heard the voice shout, "Get me the key to this door. NOW!" Immediately her animal instinct survival technique kicked in. Fuelled by the sudden rush of adrenaline combined with fear, she became totally alert and knew exactly what to do. There was a small door leading from her suite to a steep staircase down to what Lorenzo called the diver's wet room. It had wet suits, snorkels, oxygen tanks and all sorts of diving gear hanging up. A small door from it opened out to the sea, just above the waterline. A platform could also be lowered by pressing a green button. She would go down there, open the door and dive into the warm Mediterranean Sea. As long as she put her glasses into her bum bag first, she would be OK..... unless the police started shooting at her! But as they were on the other side of the yacht, she might escape unseen. Or, she could just take her chances and surrender to them, but this looked like something really heavy to her and she wanted no part of it. Right at that moment her phone rang.

"Paul, Paul, oh mon Dieu, thank you, thank you, where are you? I'm in big trouble, I have to get off this boat, the police are boarding, where are you?"

"Carla, stay calm, I can see you, I'm nearly there, I can see a police launch alongside, what do you want me to do? Are you OK?"

"Oh Paul, I love you Paul, help me, please."

"It's OK, ma cherie, I'm here, I'm here, now tell me what to do."

“Come to the opposite side of the boat to where the police are. I will open the diver’s door and jump onto your boat. I will have 4 flight cases with me. They have the full range of jewellery in them. Oh Paul, please do it, and Paul, cover your face with something in case they see you. I’ll be waiting.”

“OK, I’ll be there in one minute. Hold on – I’m coming.”

Carla picked up two flight cases, tucked them under her arms, then lifted the other two remaining cases and carefully carried them down the stairs. She heard the suite door being forcefully opened as she closed the door to the stairwell. She opened the diver’s door, pressed the green button to lower the platform, and stepped out onto it as Paul’s boat came alongside. Paul’s boat was about a metre below the platform, and she noticed straight away that Mickey Mouse was driving it! If it wasn’t for the seriousness of the situation, she would have fallen about laughing. Then she remembered Paul kept a Mickey Mouse mask on the boat to amuse children. It certainly came in handy today! She closed the diver’s door and threw the flight cases down to him one by one, and then before she jumped down herself into his waiting arms she pressed the red button which raised the platform back up.. She gave him a big kiss and said, “Let’s get out of here, fast!” The engine on Paul’s boat was badly needing refurbished, and it belched out smoke, so he moved off very slowly with low revs so as not to attract attention from the noise and smoke.

They left the yacht unseen, and very quickly got around the other side of the island to be completely out of sight. At that point Paul gave the boat full throttle, and it surged ahead towards Sainte-Maxime and safety. Paul had already made alternative arrangements with a colleague to bring his few passengers back from St Tropez on their boat so he could return and do some work on his engine. When they were almost there, he slowed the boat right down until it stopped, looked at Carla and said, “I thought you were scared of mice?” She went up to him and pulled the Mickey Mouse mask off his head. The elastic broke and pinged his face. “Ouch!” he shouted. “Now you’re for it,” he added. He came up to her, reached out and carefully removed her glasses. He gently put them down on a seat, and she said, “What are you doing?”

“This,” he said, and he took her face in his hands and gave her a long, gentle kiss. Carla immediately felt a tingling rush of pins and needles surge right through her. When she returned the kiss, they frantically hugged, kissed, and thought it would never end. She’d never felt like this before. Never.

“Do you remember what you said to me on the phone?” Paul asked.

“Yes, I think it was ‘help’, or something like that.”

“And what else?”

“Umm..... dunno. Give me a clue.”

“You said you loved me.”

“Did I? It must have been the fear talking.” By now she damned well knew what he was talking about, but she didn’t want to admit it and spoil a good friendship.

“I think you should remember the old Chinese proverb, ‘In fear there is truth’,” he said.

She just shrugged her shoulders. Then he said it, "I love you."

"No you don't. I bet you say that to all the damsels in distress that you rescue!"

"No, just you. And now you're going to tell me I've just ruined a beautiful friendship!"

"Come here," she said, "you've just transformed a beautiful friendship into a beautiful partnership. I do love you. There, I've said it. I love you, love you, love you!"

They kissed passionately, then Paul said, "I think we should get back now, I don't trust these police, and there are funny people out there in yachts!"

They got back to the jetty at Sainte-Maxime, moored the boat, and walked up to Paul's trailer home where he lived in the boatyard. "I need a drink after all that," he said, pouring two cold lagers from the fridge. "Let me see this famous jewellery that has caused all this trouble." Carla took a long refreshing gulp of her drink and opened the first case.

"Are they all the same?" he asked. Paul made a sound like "Phew" when he saw the contents.

She opened the other cases, and then came to the fourth case which had been added on the boat. "This one's locked," she said.

"Let me see," Paul said, "I can open this with a hammer and a screwdriver."

He got the tools from a tool box, and started to demolish the locks. Eventually the latches sprung up and he opened the case. When they saw what was inside, their jaws dropped to the floor! Unbelievable!

## CHAPTER 5

Paul looked at Carla. Carla looked at Paul. They both looked at the case again. Both together, at exactly the same time, they exclaimed “WOW!” In front of their very eyes were bundles and bundles of used American dollars packed tightly into the case. Paul took a bundle out. “These are fifty grand bundles,” he said incredulously, with a smile from ear to ear, “and there are about a hundred here! Do you know how much that is? DO YOU?”

“Umm..... five million?” Carla squeaked.

“Say that again,” Paul laughed.

“Five million, FIVE MILLION!” Carla screamed.

“Someone’s gonna want this back,” Paul said quietly. “This is too heavy for us to handle,” he added. “We’ve got to hand this in to the police.”

“They don’t know we’ve got it,” Carla reasoned. “We weren’t seen.”

“But you disappeared, the cases disappeared, and the money disappeared. Your man is going to put two and two together. It’s not rocket science. We’re in big trouble here,” Paul said with a worried frown.

Carla gave him a hug and said, “Let’s sleep on it. He already told me to guard the cases with my life. I thought the fourth case had more jewellery in it. I’m only doing what I was told. Anyway, he’s in custody and probably going to be put behind bars.”

They spent the night talking non-stop about what they could do with \$5,000,000 while drinking more and more lager. By midnight they were exhausted and fell asleep in each others arms.

Next morning, Paul got up with the head from Hell! “Oh, it hurts, never again!” he moaned while putting some coffee on. It was 7:30 and he turned the radio on for the local news on the music station from Monte Carlo, his favourite station. What he heard next completely floored him. As soon as he realised what they were reporting, he shook Carla awake. “Listen, listen,” he hissed. They were both silent as they listened.

*“We have just received news of an incident which occurred off an uninhabited rocky island just south of the island of the National Park of Port-Cros. Yesterday afternoon, the motor yacht 'Gravita Z-Ro' was intercepted and arrested by the police under the suspicion of illegal people trafficking. The yacht is owned by multi-millionaire Lorenzo Agastini, owner of the Italian designer jewellery company Gravita Z-Ro. Mr Agastini was arrested along with Helena Breda, Alonso De Luca, Mario Ferrari, and three unidentified North Africans including a young boy. The four Italian nationals are suspected to have been part of a human trafficking syndicate and have been under observation by the police for four months. Yesterday’s arrest was the culmination of a long investigation when it was alleged that a large payment of cash was transferred from an unidentified North African boat to the Gravita Z-Ro along with the people being smuggled aboard. Apparently this was a very large sum covering all of the transactions*

*over the last six months. The police are still trying to locate this sum, and it is alleged that it may have been thrown overboard. The African family are in a holding centre subject to their repatriation home. The others have been detained pending trial. We will keep you informed as we receive further news.”*

Carla sat nervously playing with her glasses throughout the whole report. She fondled them, opened and closed them, sucked on their legs, then put them back on. “Did we just hear that?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Paul, with a grim expression, “we sure did. That report was unusual in its detail. They must have concrete evidence against them. What do we do now? What do we do with the money?”

“What money?” Carla said with an innocent ‘little girl’ look.

“Come on, you don’t mean...”

“We don’t know anything about any money. They’ve lost it, we’ve disappeared. End of story.”

“But we HAVE to do something,” Paul insisted.

“OK,” Carla quickly replied, “we get married!”

“What? WHAT?!”

“You don’t want to?”

“Yes..... YES! Of course I do!”

“OK, that’s settled then,” Carla said, matter-of-factly.

“But what do we do with the... err... money that doesn’t exist?”

“Simple. We hide it until the heat goes down, then we use it – gradually. You can get a new boat engine, and you can buy a new boat – for me! I want to do tourist trips with you – we’re a great team!” Paul was speechless. “And most of all,” Carla continued, “I want to walk down the aisle in my grandma’s necklace with her to see me while she still can, and then join you for the rest of our lives.”

Paul smiled, hugged her, and then gave her a big passionate kiss. This all sounded too good to be true. Secretly he had this nagging feeling that someone, somewhere, was going to move heaven and earth to get that money back. He blanked it out of his mind, and they both jumped back into bed.



## CHAPTER 6

Midnight.

"I want to see my lawyer. I have the right. You can't hold me here. Do you know who I am? You are seriously overstepping your authority here, do you know that? I personally know the Italian Police Chief Commissioner and he will create a major international incident over this. It's your jobs that will be on the line, do you hear me?" The officers in the room just ignored Lorenzo. He started getting violent and throwing his arms around, to which they just re-cuffed him and pushed him back down onto the seat. He could see he was getting nowhere.

"Now let's just get one thing straight here before we go any further sir." The leading officer spoke for the first time. "You have been arrested due to the overwhelming evidence against you. We have been watching you for months. You have left a trail like breadcrumbs. You have been careless - we have not. We have won your little game. You can see your lawyer tomorrow. He will advise you to cooperate with us fully. It is your only chance for the unlikely result of a reduced sentence. It is the end for you, sir. You might as well accept it. Now get some sleep and we shall continue this in the morning, although it is a cut-and-dried case and shouldn't take long to prepare it for trial. Would you like something to eat or drink sir?" Lorenzo scowled at the officer, and then lay his head down on the table, banging his feet on the floor.

Carla and Paul lay for a couple of hours thinking in silence, then Paul spoke. "We really can't keep this money. We can't, no way."

"Why?"

"How are we going to spend used American dollars? Huh? Think about it. How can I buy a boat engine or even a boat with cash like that? We'd arouse suspicion right away from the start. We can't spend it anywhere, except maybe change a few dollars and buy a candy bar! The money is useless to us. It might even be marked for all we know. We're taking it to the police this morning."

"Wait, wait, WAIT!" Carla panicked. "There must be a way. There's GOT to be a way. Have you heard of money laundering?"

"I've heard of it, but that's out of my league. The only laundering I ever get done is my overalls."

"But Paul, my love, you think about it. Think about the new engine for your boat. You really need it. Think about a new boat for me. Think about us expanding the business. Think about us working together. Think of our future. It's all there in that case. It's all ours by right. We could have died over that. It's GOT to be worth it. Please think about it..... for me? Pretty please?"

Carla was very very insistent. "I'm going out," Paul suddenly said. "I need to think and clear my head."

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