

BLURB

The best laid plans can still go awry...in the most terrifying way.

Shanice Lawrence is hiding, but she soon learns that everything she's been told has been a lie. After she and Cruz finally reunite, she's happy and content in the life they've built together. A normal life, far from the turmoil of the past. But then the unthinkable happens, and she's thrust into a nightmare she didn't see coming.

When Cruz Cordoba finds Shanice alive, he vows to never leave her again, and for a while, life is good—a far cry from the violence and chaos he's used to as a Plan B assassin. Unfortunately, a deadly force won't leave the couple alone.

In the end, Cruz has no choice. Kill, or be killed.

Until Death by Delaney Diamond

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Predawn, her soft body pressed against his under the covers. She moaned, and he took that sound as an invitation. Pushing up against her backside, he spread his fingers over her soft tummy, and she giggled and slapped his hand.

"Don't you dare," she warned. "You've already worn me out for the morning."

Cruz pressed his lips against the curve at the side of her neck. "I have a lot of energy," he whispered.

"I know. That's why I'm warning you."

He heard the smile in her voice and smiled, too. Then he pulled her tighter against his body, enjoying the closeness they shared—the sweet, enticing scent of her skin and hair, and the comfort of having someone to wake up to in the morning. He simulated sex against her bottom by thrusting his hips forward and backward. She started laughing, and because she laughed he continued to do it, because her happiness was more important to him than anything else in the world.

But then the laughter faded, and she faded. He stopped thrusting as his arms became empty. He could no longer feel her, and his heart started beating fast. He grabbed at her but clutched empty air. Why couldn't he feel her anymore? As panic grabbed him by the throat, he stretched his arms in vain to hold onto her. She was disappearing right before his eyes, the laughter distant and the sight of her almost gone.

No.

He couldn't get the word out. It lodged at the base of his throat, like a wayward golf ball, shutting off his air and choking the life from him.

No.

He couldn't let her go. He couldn't.

His heart battered his ribs and his grasping hands became more frantic, but he couldn't reach her, couldn't hold onto her.

She was fading, fading...

Cruz's eyes flew open. Every muscle in his body was clenched tight, the thin sheets wrapped around his thighs, and the fingers of his right hand curled into the mattress beside him. He hauled air into his lungs and tried to calm his racing heart.

The phone ringing had pulled him from his nightmare. It rang two more times but he didn't answer, letting it go to voicemail because he already knew who was calling by the unique ring tone. Miles. And he didn't want to talk to him.

Cruz stared up at the ceiling in the dark room. The last time he'd been in this apartment had been with Shanice, when she'd told him everything she knew about the missing data and the death of her friend. She'd taken the chance and shared the information with him, despite her original fears that he could no more be trusted than the deadly assassins who were after her.

With stark wakefulness, he faced the grim reality that Shanice wasn't there. The nightmare was not a dream, but his present. Someone had removed her from his life, the best thing that had happened to him...ever. The spot where she should be sleeping beside him on the bed was cold and empty, because she was gone for good.

Cruz relaxed his tense body and ran a hand over his hard, aching dick and groaned.

The past four weeks had been difficult—with the agony of loss consuming him—but his mission had made them bearable. Nancy Cheng, the director of Plan B, had offered the agency's services to help him find out who'd blown up his house and killed Shanice, but he'd turned her down. They'd done enough by confirming through DNA analysis that the fragments of human remains uncovered at the scene had been her. Focusing on retribution kept him driven and energized. All of his hard work would pay off tonight, and if he didn't get the answers he wanted, he'd simply dispose of the men and keep searching until he got the answers to his questions.

He tossed aside the sheet and rolled out of bed. Dropping to the floor, he brought his heart rate back up and primed his muscles by doing fifty one-handed pushups on each arm. Then he dressed in silence, tugging on a pair of jeans and a vintage blue T-shirt with a skull and crossbones on the front. He slipped heavy boots onto his feet and then washed his face in the bathroom.

When he finished, he checked his appearance in the mirror and passed a comb through his too long black hair and the whiskers on his jaw. He hadn't shaved or had a haircut in weeks, caring little about his appearance for the time being.

He then stepped out of the bathroom and picked up a small duffel bag on the desk against the wall, casting a cursory glance over the interior of the studio apartment because he didn't know when he'd be back. Satisfied, he grabbed his keys and left.

Time to get to work.



CRUZ SAT with his elbow resting on the open window of a rented charcoal-gray SUV in the gravel and dirt-covered parking lot of Peter's Bar. The seedy-looking spot on the outskirts of Miami was filled with cars from patrons coming and going every few minutes. Loud rock music poured from the inside each time someone entered or exited the building. From this location, he had a good view of the entrance and knew the men he was waiting for would arrive shortly. He'd watched them for a while and knew their routine. All he had to do was wait, and he'd get them both at the same time.

As expected, they arrived together in an older model gray pickup and parked a couple of cars over. His eyes narrowed as he watched them approach the door.

The first was Tony Ortiz, five foot ten with dark hair and a wiry build. Highly skilled, if you considered that he was a demolitions expert with a construction company. His knowledge of explosives meant he had the expertise to obliterate a building without destroying surrounding structures.

His brother, Edgar, followed behind him and was about the same height but with sandy-blond hair and a stocky build. He was a mechanic at a Honda dealership and had a short rap sheet of offenses from his youth. The usual dumb shit like vandalism, fighting, and underage drinking.

These were the jokers he'd seen drive out of his neighborhood in Islamorada the day his house had been blown to smithereens with Shanice inside. He swallowed past the lump in his throat as renewed grief and anger overcame him.

It hadn't taken him long to find them because they were clearly amateurs, wannabe thugs who had been dumb enough to drive into Cruz's neighborhood in a two-door Honda Civic a customer brought in for repairs to the dealership where Edgar worked. They'd had enough sense to swap the license plates, but used the plate from another vehicle on the lot. Not so smart, and easy to trace.

Cruz's gaze followed them as they entered the bar, talking and grinning from ear to ear, unaware he'd been watching them for two weeks. Once Cruz tracked down Edgar, he was led to Tony in short order. After that, he simply used the patience of surveillance to find out where Tony worked, where they both lived, and who were the people they cared about. He also learned they loved to drink at Peter's Bar and hit the spot three nights a week, especially hard on Friday nights.

Tonight was Friday night.

Cruz rolled up the window and picked up a roll of quarters from the console and stuck them in his pants pocket when he exited the SUV. He hadn't always entered the bar during his surveillance, but he hadn't eaten since lunch and was hungry. Might as well get a bite to eat while he was there.

He entered the gloomy bar and quickly assessed the interior like he'd done several times before. The place smelled like hot wings, beer, and sweat, and in addition to the loud music, there was loud talking from the mostly male clientele. Through an open door, he saw a group of men playing pool, yelling and trashing each other over the table. His gaze landed on the brothers seated on two wooden stools in front of the bar. Now that he had them in sight, he scanned the room to find a spot where he could keep an eye on them.

No one paid him any mind as he sauntered to a corner, deep in the shadows so he wouldn't draw attention to himself. Not easy to do with a man of his size, but he learned long ago to blend into the background. He sat on a plain wood chair at the plain wood table, and from this vantage point had a view of the bar where the brothers sat yakking it up with the Dominican bartender and other customers.

The waitress came over, chewing gum, and flicked her gaze over Cruz. He recognized her from one of the other nights he had been there. She wore false lashes that were too long and her dark hair pulled back into a short ponytail.

"Hi, I'm Tina. I'll be your server tonight. What can I get for you, *papi*?" She popped her gum and pulled a pad and pencil from the pocket of her apron.

"Whiskey, straight up, then a root beer with your largest hamburger and two orders of fries."

"Two?"

Cruz nodded.

The waitress scribbled down the words. "Cheese on that burger?" she asked.

"Sure, why not?" He flashed a disarming smile, and she smiled back.

"Coming right up, big boy."

She walked away with her hips swaying and looked over her shoulder to make sure he was still watching. He flicked his gaze away before she could see that he had been watching because he didn't want her to think that he was interested.

Cruz widened his legs and sat back in the chair. The bar would be filled to capacity soon, with people anxious to burn through their paychecks. The brothers worked on beers and a basket of wings each. He knew that this was just the beginning for them. They would be there for at least another two hours.

But he had nothing better to do than wait. He no longer had a job ever since he had left his position at Plan B. He no longer had a woman, because someone had taken her life and destroyed his in the process. It took a lot of willpower not to charge over there and bash their skulls against the bar top for what they had done, because he was certain these were the men who had killed Shanice.

He had every intention of killing them. But first, he needed to find out who had sent them.