

Excerpt from Chapter 1, *The Cadieux Murders*, by R.J. Koreto

Wren stood on the shore and stared, trying to sort out her feelings about the ineffable house in front of her. She was only vaguely aware that while she looked at the house, her companion looked at her.

"So, Ms. Architect—what say you?" Bronwyn finally asked. Wren saw her wry smile. She knew she'd have to answer, and Bronwyn would expect it to be clever.

"Architecture should speak of its time and place, but yearn for timelessness," Wren said.

"Is that an original observation?" asked Bronwyn.

Wren laughed. "You flatter me. It's the great modernist architect Frank Gehry. This house is very much of its time and place. Look at the white stucco walls, the glass and steel, the absolute cleanliness of lines. The geometric arrangement of the layers is mathematically perfect."

"Why do I sense a 'but' coming?" asked the woman, arching an eyebrow.

Wren knew there could be no softening the message. "I don't find it welcoming. There is something very self-aware about modernist homes. A look-at-me arrogance about them, as if they are doing you a favor of letting you inside." She paused, wondering if she had gone too far. "But maybe I'm being unfair. I haven't been inside it yet. And there's no doubt that it's stunning." She looked at Bronwyn, waiting for her reaction.

"Are you saying I may have made a mistake buying it?" asked Bronwyn. Wren heard the teasing in her voice.

"No. Nobody ever made a mistake buying a house that spoke to them." *Yes, even if they spent \$30 million for it.* "If you are honest with yourself about what you want, you will be happy here. And if you are honest with me, I guarantee I can give you what you want with the renovation."

"Fair enough," said Bronwyn. "Was that Frank Gehry again?"

"No, that was entirely me."

"Ah. But as Gehry said, it should yearn for timeliness. Has this succeeded in that?"

"We'll need to give it another century."

Bronwyn nodded. "Maybe it's because I'm a writer. I become obsessed in making sure my books, the plots and subplots, are exciting. This house looks exciting. I was happy in my nice, simple co-op, and then my financial advisor told me I could do better. Much better. I fell in love with this right away. The more I walked through it, the more I liked it, the idea that I will be able to stay in it a long time, and keep finding something new about it."

"Then you absolutely did the right thing. Indeed, that is the very purpose of a house like this," said Wren. She mulled over her next statement. "When I was a girl, however, I wanted to live in a Victorian manor house, with a great hall with a huge hearth and handmade wooden furniture. I'd wear long dresses and be attended to by maids in starched uniforms." *Did I just sound silly?*

"That's very romantic," said Bronwyn, and Wren wondered if that was a criticism, a put-down for a flighty young girl. "But then again, I feel romantic about this, about men in classic tuxedos and women in Chanel dresses, with cigarettes and dry martinis and Dave Brubeck playing in the background. I guess we're both *emotional* that way, so despite our differences about favorite eras, I'm thinking hiring you is going to turn out to be a good decision as well."

Wren felt relief wash over her. She felt confident building houses but closing a deal—that involved people. She still didn't trust her abilities when people were involved. Of course, there

was still one more feature of the house they needed to discuss: The "tragedy." That's how the papers had described it.

But Wren wasn't going to bring it up first.

Bronwyn hugged her leather jacket. "It's a great view, but it's getting cold. Let's go inside."

Yes. Wren always looked over the outside first, but she was especially excited about seeing the interior. Until Bronwyn had bought it a few weeks ago, no one had been inside the house since the 1950s, except for the caretaker staff.

The house overwhelmed Wren despite herself. Oh yes, she thought, Marius Cadieux knew it would. He would be so amused. So very proud. No—*smug*. Even if it wasn't to her taste, there was no denying what Cadieux had achieved here: the soaring ceiling, the clever use of windows filling the house with light even on a dreary day, the unexpected curves and angles, the steel staircase, which also served as a sculpture. Wren just stared. There really was nothing to compare it to—a Cadieux house was always unique. She could see him standing over her, "Very nice, isn't it, little one? And of course, your client is overwhelmed by it, as she should be."

"I'm glad I bought a house that even knocks the socks off another architect," said Bronwyn, grinning.

"It certainly does," said Wren. "I've seen pictures, but they're not the same as really being inside it." Wren took in Bronwyn, with her attractive, angular face and the matching pixie haircut. Did the author indeed have a modernist personality, a match for this home, a connection with Cadieux? Indeed, did Bronwyn know how perfect she looked in her new house?

Wren walked among the rooms, taking note of the artful ways Cadieux had divided the house—very few true walls and doors, just a series of levels and passages, rectangular pillars

clad in stone. Cadieux loved granite and marble, quartzite and sandstone, and merged them with oak and walnut, teak and lyptus. Wren saw Bronwyn marveling over it, even though she had already visited her new home several times. That was the thing about a Cadieux home, that Bronwyn had already realized: You could live there 40 years and marvel over it every day for the rest of your life.

"I'd like to see upstairs." Wren smiled. "But as you no doubt noticed, 'upstairs' is relative in a Cadieux house, with its intersecting layers. It just flows. That was a hallmark of Cadieux, but none I've seen are quite as..." She let her voice trail off.

"You can't find the word?" said Bronwyn.

"You're the writer—can you? Architectural journalists struggled to describe him. But here we go... 'intriguing.' No other Cadieux house is as *intriguing* as this one. It may take me a while to figure it out."

"You mean, how it's put together?" asked Bronwyn.

"Oh no. That's easy. I meant what is its personality? Marius Cadieux stamped a *personality* on this house. It has a reason, and I will find out what that is. For now, we look at it: See the extraordinary flow of the house, the ways the rooms are separate and yet merge into each other, the way the light plays along the floors and walls. The materials blend into each other, and Cadieux is taught in every architecture school—as if you could teach this."

"It sounds like you studied him," said Bronwyn. "It sounds like you knew him. Did you?" She fixed her eyes on Wren, who gave that question some thought.

She didn't want to go there, not yet.

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