



Bodybuilding's golden couple met in a Los Angeles gym and were married in 2000. Left: the ambitious Titus often derided fellow competitors, describing himself as "a rottweiler in a land of golden retrievers".

The secret to Ryan's success – according to her – was her musclemen husband, champion bodybuilder Titus, 41. The couple met at the famed Gold's Gym in Los Angeles, and it was love – and lust – at first sight. Hailed as the number one world heavyweight contender for amateur titles, Titus was the king of the muscle scene and appeared on magazine covers worldwide. The only hiccup in his ambitious career had been a prison stint in 1997 for conspiring to possess and sell ecstasy. Titus was also outspoken, often giving fellow competitors a verbal battering: "I'm like a rottweiler in a land of golden retrievers," he told a reporter. After his time in jail, Titus came back in full force, capturing more titles, snarling at opponents and earning the mantle of "Bad Boy of Bodybuilding". It was his searing ambition and drive that inspired Ryan. "When I see how hard Craig works to prepare for a show, it makes me feel like nothing is out of my grasp," she once said.

Ryan and Titus became America's glamour bodybuilding couple. They dreamt of a future filled with money and success, hatching plans to start training competitors and to launch clothing and perfume lines. After marrying in 2000, they moved to Las Vegas, where they co-founded a company called Emperor Enterprises to invest in real estate and help them create their ideal life. They also built a gym in their home for training sessions, and Ryan's bright

personality drew in the clients. They regularly trained attractive young women, often forging emotional relationships with them and sometimes inviting them to share their house.

And they weren't short of admirers. The pair were riding the crest of a wave, with Titus's career in overdrive, energised by his appearance on a television special in 2004 as the trainer for Mötley Crüe frontman Vince Neil. Fame, endorsements and money flowed in, and with them came adoring fans. The partying in the Titus household was non-stop. Designer-clad guests came and went at all hours, racing up to the estate in flashy cars to hang out with the Vegas "It couple".

It looked like they had realised all their dreams – until, in October 2005, Titus made a fateful phone call to old friend Melissa James.

**"POOR MELISSA," SAYS A FRIEND OF RYAN AND TITUS. "SHE JUST WASN'T SOPHISTICATED ENOUGH TO HOLD HER OWN WITH THESE DECADENT PEOPLE"**

The pair had met in 1996 in Melissa's home town of Panama City, Florida, through a mutual acquaintance and, some years later, the bubbly dance teacher and part-time model had moved in for a while with Ryan and Titus. This time, he was calling to invite her to Vegas to be their personal assistant, and she accepted. Little did she know, she'd never make it home again.

Over the following two months, Melissa became an integral part of her employers' organisation, booking training sessions and overseeing the accounts. She adored the high-profile pair she worked for, but it was clear that she was an innocent awash in a sea of glamour. "Poor Melissa. She was a sweet girl, but in over her head," says a close friend of Ryan and Titus. "She just wasn't sophisticated or clever enough to hold her own with these stylish and somewhat decadent people. Kelly was a nice enough girl. She was like a 'den mother' to the girls she and Craig trained – but it was hard to know if it was out of kindness or just a shrewd business sense."

All appeared to be well – until December 13. Melissa called her mother, Maura, at around 11.30am. She was heading home for the Christmas holidays and wanted to give her the flight details. "See you tomorrow!" she promised. But when her mum went to the airport the following morning, Melissa was nowhere to be seen. "I thought she'd been in an accident or something," a devastated Maura reflects. She phoned Titus several times, leaving increasingly distraught messages. "I started calling hospitals in Las Vegas. Nobody had her." Then Maura got the call every parent dreads: Melissa was dead.

When detectives spoke to Ryan on December 14, she told them Melissa had stolen her car, and the couple claimed she'd been taking money from their bank account ▶