



In an attempt to disguise themselves while on the run from police, Titus shaved his head and Ryan dyed her blonde hair dark brown. Once in custody, the couple changed their stories several times and refused to reveal their true motive for murder.

and charging items to their credit cards, although they hadn't reported it. But as detectives delved further, their stories began to get muddy. Titus revealed he was having an affair with Melissa and that his wife didn't know. He spoke of tension between the women – Ryan thought Melissa had embezzled money – and said he'd rented a room for his lover at a hotel, paying for the nights of December 12–14 with his company credit card, and staying one night himself. Melissa had called her mother to say she was staying in a hotel because Ryan was "flipping out".

Ryan was nervous during her grilling but Titus remained cool, admitting to his previous jail term and calmly arguing his innocence by saying he had "no intention of going back".

Despite their suspicions, police set Ryan and Titus free due to a lack of evidence, and the couple immediately made plans to flee. Ryan packed their bags and Titus arranged to trade in his Dodge Viper for a new truck.

The next day, they visited friend Amanda Polk, who'd trained under Ryan. Highly agitated, Ryan told Polk that her car had been found burnt out with a body inside, then she changed her tune and said she'd discovered Melissa dead in her room from an overdose. Finally, she let it slip that her life was ruined because she'd bought bottles of lighter fluid with her credit card.

Shaken and confused, Polk confronted Ryan about why she didn't contact the police. She was horrified at the response – Ryan said Titus had told her, "No body, no crime." Polk let the couple stay one night and then secretly tipped off the police.

The fugitives, meanwhile, drove east to Massachusetts, where Titus planned to meet up with an old friend to secure some money before heading to Mexico or Greece.

But the net was closing in. Five days after Melissa's death, police interviewed aspiring

bodybuilder Anthony Gross, 23, who revealed that Titus had called in the early hours of December 14 and told him to get a can of petrol and meet him. Puzzled, Gross had hastily left his apartment in his pyjamas, filled up a petrol can and driven to remote Sandy Valley Road, about 50 kilometres east of Las Vegas. When he arrived, he says, Ryan jumped out of the Jaguar and into his truck, while Gross handed Titus the petrol can. A minute later, Titus climbed into the back seat and yelled, "Go! Go! Go!" According to his statement, Gross drove the couple back to Las Vegas without discussing the incident.

Gross's testimony was the breakthrough authorities needed. Police issued three arrest warrants – one for Gross, who was taken into custody and charged with accessory to murder and third-degree arson, and the others for Ryan and Titus. But the bodybuilders had already fled.

The FBI issued nationwide bulletins, the couple were identified on national television as murder suspects, and a media frenzy began.

RYAN WAS HAVING A PEDICURE AT A NAIL SALON WHEN A SWAT TEAM BURST IN AND ARRESTED HER, THEN POUNCED ON TITUS, WHO WAS WAITING OUTSIDE

Headlines screamed "Husband-Wife Bodybuilders Sought In Las Vegas Slaying" and "Bodybuilder Admits To Affair", while Melissa's tearful mother appeared on news programs demanding justice for her "sweet, kind and considerate" daughter.

The fitness world was rife with rumour, gossip and debate. There were reports of an explicit sex tape showing Melissa with an unknown girl and the husband and wife in a passionate X-rated encounter. Allegations emerged that Ryan and Titus were regulars at strip clubs, where they trolled for sex partners,

and that they both had drug habits and took steroids. Opinions were polarised, with some friends claiming Ryan was the victim and others suggesting she was the ringleader.

Whatever the truth, on December 23, acting on a tip-off, the FBI finally captured the runaway couple in Massachusetts. Ryan was having a pedicure at a nail salon when a SWAT team burst in and arrested her, then pounced on Titus, who was waiting outside in his truck. They'd seemingly tried to disguise themselves – he'd shaved his head and she had dyed her hair dark brown. They protested their innocence but were taken back to Las Vegas, where a hearing declared they were to be charged with arson, kidnapping and murder.

But what police still couldn't uncover was a motive. What they did find, however, were even more grisly details: morphine was found in Melissa's system and detectives recovered a stun gun that had been fired at the Titus home. It's thought that Melissa was knocked out with the gun, drugged and then strangled before being set alight in the Jaguar.

Only Ryan and Titus know what really happened that night and, so far, they're not telling. Titus later gave two more versions of events, one saying he found Melissa dead in the car and panicked, and the other that she died during rough sex.

Held in Nevada's Clark County jail, Titus and Ryan both attended a bail hearing on February 10, 2006, where, at the sight of his once-beautiful wife shackled, dressed in an austere blue prison jumpsuit, with her dark dyed locks hanging limply about her shoulders, Titus broke down and cried.

She, on the other hand, gazed at him with love. As one insider said, "Craig and Kelly were the royal couple of bodybuilding. One or both of them must have snapped but, true to form, they stuck together and vowed to carry their secret to their graves." ■