

The Unlikely Suspect

Reed's Realm

Making his way back to his office from the Emperor's Palace, Reed decided to drop by Martin's office to grab the note he had left him and give his friend an update. Upon reaching his door, he found it open and Martin sitting behind his desk.

"Knock, knock!" Reed said as he tapped on the door frame twice and walked into Martin's space.

Martin looked up and smiled. "Reed, I'm glad to see you. I got your note. To be honest, it gave me a little scare. Guess it turned out okay?" Martin asked.

"Yeah. Ronald Jeremiah wanted to talk about Peter Kerigan's death," Reed said as he walked over and sat down in one of the chairs in front of Martin's desk.

"Well, what did you find out?" Martin asked.

"The only thing I learned is that he's going to make this case a lot more complicated for us. All he really did was try to spoon feed me a bunch of bullshit, I think. Wants us to do his dirty work for him," Reed answered. "By the way, I got your phone message about Jo Jo. That was quick work, Martin."

"Speaking of that," Martin said, "I did some digging this morning to try and find more information about that empty warehouse where we found Jo Jo."

"Did you come up with anything?" Reed asked.

"As a matter of fact I did," Martin said as he turned and grabbed a sheet of paper off his printer. "I wanted to try and find out who owned the warehouse. That turned out to be a little harder than I expected, and what I found was a little bit odd."

"How so?" Reed asked.

"The warehouse used to be part of Dooley's Steel Company. They exported steel beams that are used in the frame work of buildings; mainly skyscrapers. The company was owned by Jack Dooley for 30 years, and by his father and grandfather the previous 40. When Jack Dooley passed away six years ago, none of his kids, which were three girls, wanted to continue

the family business. So they sold what they could, but after the economy dropped after 9/11 and all the new import and export laws kicked in, they were not able to find anyone that wanted to buy the warehouse. That was until eight months ago.”

Martin looked up at Reed and winked. “Now this is where it gets interesting.” Martin said. “See, the warehouse was not even on the market after the listing expired. It was just sitting there. Then, out of the blue, the Dooley’s were contacted by a real estate company called Southern United Realty. They offered a generous figure of four and half million dollars for the warehouse and dock space. Of course, the Dooley’s took the deal. For the past eight months the building has been owned by this Southern Union Realty company and they just let it sit. Nothing has been done to try and upgrade the property, as a matter of fact, it has not been listed for sale and when I called Southern Union Realty about it, I was only told it was not for sale.

“My phone conversation with the lady was a little weird. She got really uncomfortable when I started asking questions about Southern Union. She only said that it was a privately owned company, and abruptly got off the phone. It was clear that she didn’t want to talk. So I did some more digging in regard to Southern Union Realty and found out that they are a fairly new realty company that is owned by an import company that already has dock space at the port. It turns out that this Southern Union Realty has bought more than just one warehouse. They have been buying as much property along the port as possible and now own the majority of the empty warehouses. And what have they done with all these warehouses?” Martin asked Reed.

Reed smiled and shook his head. It seemed his friend had enjoyed this research assignment. “I don’t know, what?” Reed asked.

“Absolutely, positively, nothing! They are just letting them sit empty and be the night time homes to a bunch of bums,” Martin said. “It just doesn’t make much sense to me for a company to buy up the warehouses, not up keep them, and just let them sit. I know there has to be some kind of plan for them, but I can’t seem to make any guess on what that might be. As I said before, I just find it all to be a little weird,” Martin finalized.

Martin placed the document he was holding on his desk to lie among all of the rest of the loose papers that were strung about. He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms.

“Wow, you have been busy this morning, haven’t you?” Reed asked, standing and walking slowly towards the office door. “Something tells me that you will put some sense to it all. You always seem to.”

“I don’t know. Maybe I am just barking up the wrong tree here,” Martin said while taking a deep breath of frustration.

“I have confidence in you. If I were you, I would find out what the name of the company is that owns Southern Union Realty and check them out,” Reed offered.

“Oh, I found that out too. I have it written somewhere around here,” Martin said as he shuffled around the papers on his desk. “I plan on checking them out today.”

“Well, good luck,” Reed offered. “I am off to talk with Thomas Owens in narcotics to see what he can tell me about Jo Jo. I’m also hoping to hear soon from Dr. Fox to see what she turned up in her exam of the body. I’m praying she has good news for us.”

“Oh, here is it,” Martin said as he pulled a sheet of paper out of one of his stacks. “Drake Enterprises.”

Reed, almost completely out of Martin’s office, stopped dead in his tracks, and turned around.

“What did you say?” Reed asked.

Martin could tell by the intense look on Reed’s face that he had struck a nerve.

“Drake Enterprises. I’m going to look into who they are. They own Southern Union Realty,” Martin said.

Reed walked over and stuck out his hand. “Let me see that.”

Martin handed Reed the sheet of paper that had the contact information for Drake Enterprises, including the address and phone numbers.

“You look as if someone just kicked you in the gut,” Martin said,[standing up. “Are you ok?”

Reed took the paper and folded it over once.

“Reed, talk to me, what is up man?” Martin asked.

“You are the second person to mention Drake Enterprises to me this morning,” Reed said in a low tone.

“Who else—” Martin stopped in mid sentence and then answered his own question without hesitation. “Jeremiah!”

Reed looked up and shook his head to confirm that it was indeed Jeremiah who had first spoke to Reed about Drake Enterprises.

“Maybe he was on to something,” Reed said in a mumble. “Look, Martin, great work. I’d like for you to go and talk to Thomas Owens in regards to Jo Jo. I want to know everything he knows about our little hanging friend,” Reed said.

“You got it. What about Drake Enterprises?” Martin asked.

“I think it’s time I pay them a little visit,” Reed said with intent and determination in his eyes.

With that, Reed walked out of Martin’s office. He was not heading back to his office, but again to his car. While riding down the elevator, Reed unfolded the paper that was in his hand and glanced down at the words once more: Drake Enterprises.



Maggie's World

“We’ll take them out one by one if we have to,” Warin Drake said, his voice calm and firm.

Maggie shook her head. Her father stood on the southernmost balcony of the manor, looking over the small creek and forest surrounding the grounds. A bright, full moon illuminated the cloudless night sky. All indications of the summer storm predicted by the television weathermen were nowhere to be found. Drake wore a blue polo shirt and jeans, no shoes, and allowed his peppered gray hair to float on the occasional breeze.

“I think we need to be more cautious,” Maggie said. She didn’t think her opinions influenced her father much, but she still felt a need to express them.

Drake laughed. “We have nothing to fear, Maggie.”

“We have everything to fear. If someone gets arrested and convicted--“

The older man shook his head. “That’s not going to happen. Our kind has been living here for a long time and we’ve never been discovered. It’s not going to happen now. We’re blessed.”

“I’m not sure you’ve noticed, but the world has changed from when you were younger. We’re not immune from technology,” she said. Her father had set up this elaborate infrastructure for the Family and developed a new way of life for all the members. They were a part of society in a way that had never been possible in the past. Drake seemed to take their past exile for granted, however.

“Allowing The Company to dominate us is just as dangerous as having a confrontation with them. We need our business to be able to remain protected,” Drake said. He turned his back from the woods and leaned on the balcony wall.

“What you’re proposing is a gang war that is going to result in a lot of loss of life. I think you risk drawing attention to us in a very big way,” Maggie countered.

Drake shrugged. “If you’re uncomfortable with that, then we all just need to be very careful in what we do.”

“Why can’t we just shift our focus to legitimate business?” Maggie asked. She loved her store and that small portion of her life that was normal. It didn’t seem so unfathomable that they could turn their entire operation into a legal one.

A stiff wind ruffled Drake’s hair as she shook his head. “That is not possible. You know as well as I do how much money it takes to keep this Family supported. We have needs that most other organizations do not. It would take a lot bigger profit in your furniture business, not to mention the real estate we own, than what we have. Whether we deal in the drug trade or not, we must have police protection.” Drake pinned her with a stare for several moments. “You know that is very expensive.”

Maggie sighed and looked away into the dark trees. Her father was right. A legitimate business empire would be difficult for the family to sustain. Not to mention that it would be difficult to bring all the Family members into polite society. Many of them had no birth records or any other indication that they actually existed.

“I guess you’re right,” Maggie finally said, defeated.

A wicked smile graced Drake’s face. “That’s my girl. Now are you ready to do this job or what?”

“Sure. He’ll be dead before morning,” she said, then left her father alone on the balcony.

After changing clothes and freshening up, Maggie got in her car and began driving into the city. Driving against the flow of traffic, Maggie steeled her mind to what she needed to do. It seemed all her life, she’d been preparing for the worst. When something bad came along, she prepared herself as best she could, then got to the act as fast as possible to get it over with. This was one of those times when she just wanted the deed to be done.

She’d never coped well with negative anticipation. When her mother had first told her about Drake, she’d warned Maggie that he was not a good man. Her mother hadn’t disclosed the depth of issues that made Drake what he was, but she told Maggie enough to know that she shouldn’t ignore her gut reaction to situations. Maggie’s intuition would normally be right. So when her mother died and the time came to meet Drake, Maggie had agonized over it. She’d stayed awake the night before imagining all the ways she needed to check herself and protect herself from doing wrong. She’d vowed then, as a girl of thirteen, to never allow him to turn her into a monster.

And now here she was, on her way to kill a man she didn’t know. Even worse, this wasn’t her first mission like this.

Maggie pulled her Lexus off the highway into a residential section of Metairie. The houses, though constructed from a cookie cutter selection of similar designs, were large and expensive enough to accommodate the needs of doctors and lawyers. The lots were small, but in the limited amount of real estate available in the New Orleans area, they were considered prime. All the professionals and their stay at home wives probably couldn’t imagine that a gangster could be living in their midst—probably more than one. But even criminals apparently wanted to have the best that life could offer in suburbia.

Normally, Maggie wouldn’t want to track her prey down in such a conspicuous area. The community watch signs probably actually meant that people were keeping an eye out. There might even be video surveillance in the neighborhood. Luckily she seemed to be pretty good at getting in and out of a place without detection. She’d been told she had an innocent face.

Maggie found a small park and sports complex and parked the car. She got out and began a quick jog along the sidewalks of the neighborhood. The MapQuest image in her mind served her well as she monitored street signs along the way to her target home. By the time

she found it, she'd worked up a sweat and the sun had officially dropped below the horizon.

She surveyed the home to determine if there was an easy entry point. The entire neighborhood looked dead. No children played in the cul-de-sac or the rows of front yards. No one had front porches, much less porch swings in which to sit to watch the day go by. The house at the address Drake had given Maggie was one of the more modest in the neighborhood, but probably still thirty-five-hundred square feet. A tan stone facing covered the one-story structure. A wood-slat fence surrounded a small backyard.

Maggie grasped the top of the fence and vaulted up it, perching on the top momentarily before hopping into the yard. There were no toys or other signs of life in the yard. She didn't know how long her prey had owned the place, but it didn't look like he'd settled in. Nonetheless, there was a cranny beside the back door that would be a perfect place for her to hide until he came home.

She was after another one of Jeremiah's top lieutenants. His name wasn't important. What mattered to Drake and the Family was that he'd been putting heat on Marco and some of the Family's other key members. If not for his ability to heal, Marco would have been a victim of the man. For that, Drake couldn't let this man live.

As full dark gripped the night sky, the garage door opened and allowed entrance to one black Mercedes. Maggie was glad that The Company man hadn't had some kind of late evening errand. The time clock in the crime world could differ vastly from the normal business world. She'd only been waiting for an hour or two, so she considered herself lucky.

Inside the house, she heard the tell-tale chime of the burglar alarm being turned off. She looked through the window in the backdoor, which was only partially obscured by a curtain, to see a tall man with dark hair walk into the depths of the house, away from the kitchen and her location. Maggie picked up a gardening stone from a nearby flower bed and smashed the door glass. A section big enough for her hand fell away. She slipped her hand inside and unlocked the door. She moved into the house as fast as possible. If her target heard the sound, she needed to be upon him quickly so that he didn't have the chance to call anyone.

On the inside of the house, it was almost as sparse as the backyard. There were leather couches and chairs, and generic looking art on the wall, but somehow, the house didn't look lived in. At least it appeared that the man didn't have any kids or women living with him that

would be traumatized or put in the poorhouse when their provider left them.

Maggie moved cautiously down the hallway toward what appeared to be several bedrooms. When the toilet flushed, she knew that she need not worry about the man making any last minute calls. She took a deep breath and continued to the end of the hall. She debated with herself as to how she wanted to approach the man, if at all. She could kill him without him ever knowing what happened.

Maggie stepped into the room. The bulk of the room was to the right. A king sized sleigh bed filled most of the space, the covers disheveled from the night before. A matching dresser tucked into the corner. On the left side of the room there was a big screen flat panel television affixed to the wall. Otherwise, the bedroom was as plain as the rest of the house.

A dark-haired man in his underwear walked out of the bathroom. He paused in running his hands through his wet hair when he saw Maggie. His face, tan from more than a couple of trips to a more tropical climate, transformed from alarmed, to lecherous in moments.

“Who are you, baby? Johnny send you?” he asked, a slight Cajun accent in his voice.

Deadly brown eyes stared through him. “No, Johnny didn’t send me,” she said, not knowing why the man wasn’t already dead.

He took a step toward her. “I don’t care who sent you. I was wonderin’ what to do tonight, but I think the answer just came to me.”

Maggie closed the distance between them like lightening. Before his slimy smile could falter, her hand gripped his throat like a vice.