

Weirder and Weirder

Reed's Realm

Reed Hackman sat next to Martin in a row of folding chairs, New Orleans policemen surrounding them at every angle. Reed wished he and his friend were back in their offices or out in the field investigating his hot murder cases. Instead, they were stuck in a departmental meeting listening to a risk prevention speech from some insurance pencil neck. While New Orleans finest were being begged not to do anything to create new lawsuits, which would come regardless of the lecture, anything under the sun was going on out in the streets.

Reed's stray thoughts, and the rest of the meeting, were broken by Reed's cell phone ringing the theme from the TV show Cops.

Martin looked up at Reed hearing the tone and started to chuckle, as did several others. The speaker, or the police chief, did not look amused.

"Hey, don't even go there man!" Reed whispered in a low voice, pointing a finger at Martin who was trying not to laugh out loud. "Sorry, Chief," he said.

Reed stood, waived pardon to his fellow officers, then stepped out into the hallway to take the call. Before flipping up his cell phone he glanced at the small window on the face of his phone to see that it said:

***Dana Fox*
555-002-1933**

"Hello, Dr. Fox, how are you today," Reed said.

"I am doing well, thank you. And yourself," the doctor asked in return.

Reed stepped closer to the wall to allow a passing police officer by. "I'm fine. It's funny you called. I was just about to call you. Have you found out anything?" Reed asked settling his back against the wall.

"As a matter of fact, I have. If I am not interrupting you at the moment I would like to discuss this with you. Are you free to talk, Detective?" Dana asked.

"Actually, if it's not any trouble, I think I will just come down to your office. I'm dying to get out of this place. Would that be okay?" Reed asked.

“That would be the best thing. I was trying not to take up a lot of your time,” Dana responded.

“You’re never an inconvenience, Doctor. I will see you in just a few minutes,” Reed added walked back toward his office.



As Reed went through the front door of the City of New Orleans Medical Examiners Office, he knew that the familiar sights were not déjà vu games being played by his mind. He walked up to the desk and again stated that he was there to see Dr. Fox.

Reed walked towards the general area of the same door where Dr. Fox had met him before.

“Dr. Fox, there is a Detective Hackman here to see you,” Reed heard the receptionist, a different woman than his first visit, say from behind the desk.

She hung up the phone and shuffled papers around before saying, “Dr. Fox will be right with you, sir.”

As Reed turned to say thank you, the door opened and it was Dr. Fox. She stood in the doorway holding the door open. She wore her usual white lab coat and her hair loose around her shoulders, its dark waves popping sharply off the fabric.

“Hello, Detective,” Dr. Fox greeted.

Reed walked over and turned sideways to pass between the doctor and the opposite door frame.

“It’s good to see you, Dr. Fox.” Reed returned.

She closed the door, making sure that it latched behind her, before turning to walk down the hall towards her office and exam room.

“So how have things been going, Doctor,” Reed asked.

She looked over at Reed and gave him a surprised look as if someone had asked her if she really knew what planet she lived on.

“Well, you should know,” she stated.

“How is that?” Reed inquired putting on his best fake confused look.

“Well, let’s see. You keep sending me all these crazy bodies of men that all have abnormal issues and surprises that, at bare minimum, have been the cause of many hours of overtime, with accompanied lack of sleep on my part,” she said looking at Reed with a small hint of a smile on her face.

“Please forgive me for that, Doctor. I only work with the best, and I heard that you were the best. Was I misinformed?” Reed asked, looking at Dr. Fox with a smirk.

“I guess I can’t very well argue with that, can I?” Dr. Fox returned with a bigger smile on her face.

They reached the entrance of her office and exam rooms. The doctor opened the door and motioned Reed in first, once more holding the door for him.

“Thank you,” Reed said as he walked through . “Are we heading back to the exam room again?”

“Actually, why don’t we go to my office and have a seat and go from there,” Dr. Fox said.

Instead of going straight and heading into the exam rooms like Reed had done the first time he came to speak with Dr. Fox, she turned right and led Reed down a small corridor that went to a small but adequate office for her paperwork as a coroner.

Upon walking into her office, the first thing that Reed noticed was that all the certifications and awards were perfectly spaced in precise rows on the wall and were perpendicular to her desk. Reed was almost as impressed with the attention to detail and time it must have taken to get all the various sized frames to be so flawlessly placed, like some sort of pristinely solved mathematics illustration, as he was with all the accolades that they represented.

“That’s some wall you have there,” Reed said. “Impressive.”

“Impressive maybe, but not good enough it seems when it comes to the two mystery men that you have sent me,” the doctor responded as she took a seat behind her desk.

“Please, Detective, have a seat,” she said, pointing to one of the chairs with her opened hand.

The playful tone that had been in the air flowing back and forth between them had suddenly been blown out of the room completely. The friendly

smiles and playfulness had now given way to a feeling of total concentration and seriousness in a split second transition.

“This doesn’t sound too good,” Reed said as he sat down.

“Let me explain,” Dr. Fox said as she placed both of her hands on the desk in front of her. “You know, I have not been in this business long enough to call myself an old pro. I don’t claim to know all the answers when a case comes in. However, having said that, I have always taken great pride in being able to find and locate the critical information needed to find out about the last moments of someone’s life. It is not always easy, but these are real people and no matter what kind of person they were before they left this world. I still feel the responsibility to find out all the details and evidence needed to determine the cause of death. In a best case scenario, I find the evidence that helps lead you to the hands that performed these terrible acts.” Dr. Fox reached up and adjusted her glasses, then leaned forward, resting her hand on her desk in front of two closed files.

“I feel it is my duty to those who have died and to all those that loved them for whatever goodness was in their heart. With time and hard work, I have always been able to put the pieces together no matter how hard it was,” Dr. Fox stated.

She hesitated for a moment and took a deep breath, speaking while exhaling. “Then you sent me these two cases, and for the first time in the twelve years that I have been doing this, I am questioning my own findings. I can tell you what the causes of death were. You could look at them and tell me that yourself. Cause is not hard when a huge chunk of a body is ripped off, but it is not as easy as that. I have to answer all the questions of why and how, and I don’t like the answers that are coming to the surface,” she said, pausing.

“I don’t understand, Doctor,” Reed responded, knowing he had a confused look on his face. “What do you mean?”

“Well, let me go straight to the question that you posed to me on the phone. Do I think these cases are related to each other?” Dr. Fox took a quick look at her desk and opened both case files before continuing. “I believe that they are indeed related to one another.”

“So you did find a link,” Reed stated.

Dr. Fox pulled two pictures from the folders. One was of Kerrigan and the other of Simmons. They were both comparable photos that held the images of each man’s head, neck, and partial chest. She turned them around so that Reed could see them right side up. Then she reached into the outer left pocket of her white lab coat and removed an ink pen.

“Let’s talk about the obvious first comparisons, which are the wounds to their necks. Just speaking about the nature of the wound itself, it is very unique. This isn’t a typical fatal wound that you would normally see. Sometimes you get the occasional puncture, but more often than not a neck wound is a clean slice that is made with a sharp edged object like a knife. So to have a wound that is more like a rip or tear is very uncommon. I have not ever seen a wound such as this in my career and now I get two of them in a very short time frame. Very unusual,” Dr. Fox added.

She then reached back over into each file and brought out two sheets of paper from each, setting them over the respective pictures to which they belonged.

“These are the toxicologicals from both men. There are the normal variations that you would see when looking at blood work from two different individuals. However, if you look at the bottom of the report you will see all the, quote unquote, foreign substances that were found in their systems. They both had traces of different narcotics in their system. I want to point out this particular abbreviation and number,” Dr. Fox said, pointing at information at the bottom of Kerigan’s report. “Now look and compare that to the one on the Simmons’ report. “What do you notice, Detective?”

“The abbreviations are the same along with most of the numbers,” Reed responded.

“Do you know what those are?” Dr. Fox asked.

“I’m sorry, you’ll have to help me out with that, Doc,” Reed said.

“Those are both enzyme markers telling us that there was an enzyme foreign to the body present.” Dr. Fox looked up at Reed. “And this particular marker is telling us that both of them have high traces of the same enzyme which, in this case, was Bromelain.”

“Bromelain,” Reed said with questioning surprise. “Isn’t that the enzyme that you said was the blood thinner you were having a hard time accounting for in Kerigan?”

“Wow, you were listening last time,” Dr. Fox said with a short lived smile. “Yes, it is one and the same, but unfortunately, I am no closer to knowing why it was found in either of the men.” Dr. Fox looked up at Reed, the frustration evident in her green eyes.

“You know, Detective, it is very rare that you find these results at all compared to the norm. It would be like winning the lottery and getting struck by lightning on the same day,” Dr. Fox paused and looked at Reed

for a moment. “Having two bodies like this would be like hitting the lottery and being struck twice within a few days of one another.”

“Great, so you’re telling me that I’ve got an unknown serial killer on my hands here,” Reed asked.

“Actually, I don’t think you are, Detective,” Dr. Fox offered. “As a matter of fact, I’m not sure that these two men were killed by the same person at all.”

“I don’t understand. Everything that you’ve told me has not only proven to me that these murders are connected, but taking into consideration the rarity of the facts that are present, I can only deduce that they were both committed by the same person,” Reed said.

“At first glance, I agreed with you. However, if you look at the Bromelain enzyme tags, you will notice that they are slightly different. I was curious about the differences and I did some additional research. I ended up contacting the University of Hawaii and spoke to a professor there. He is a molecular botanist in charge of biotechnology resources at the university. He’s done research on Bromelain. I was told that the small differences in the two enzyme tags were due to the fact that even though the enzyme was the same, it came from different sources of origin,” Dr. Fox explained.

“The professor found this to be curious because the only existence of the Bromelain enzyme is in plants and can not be produced by any other living thing, animal or human,” Dr. Fox said. “The samples I produced for him, however, appeared to be an animal derived variation.”

When the Doctor did not elaborate, Reed prompted her with a wave. “Could the enzyme be based on DNA from Kerigan and Simmons?”

Dana Fox shook her head, a distant look on her face. “No. The DNA markers from both samples were different, but neither were human. He couldn’t find a match for the DNA to any animal.”

Reed stood up from his chair and walked around behind it, then leaned down and placed his hands on the back. He said nothing, looking silently at the floor. He didn’t know what to think or feel about what he was hearing.

“Detective?” Dr. Fox said, with no response from Reed.

“Detective Hackman?” she called to him again. “What are you thinking?”

Reed moved back around to the front of his chair, completing a full round trip before sitting back down.

"Honestly Doctor, I don't know what to think," Reed spoke, shifting his attention back to Dr. Fox. "I just don't know."

"I'm sorry. I wish I had better answers for you," Dr. Fox said with a somber tone.

"No need to apologize. The facts are the facts and you have done an outstanding job in bringing the facts of these cases to the surface. It is not your fault if they don't seem to make a lot of sense," Reed offered. "It seems that every step of this investigation has been like this."

Reed stood up once more and Dr. Fox did the same.

"I can't thank you enough for your efforts on these cases, Dr. Fox. You have been invaluable," Reed said, extending his hand to her. "I just have to go and catch whoever is doing this and hope that I can do that before someone else gets sent to your office."

Dr. Fox extended her hand in return.

"Thanks again for all your time, I can show myself out," Reed said as he turned to walk out of her office.

"Detective," Dr. Fox called out just as Reed was almost to the door.

Reed turned once more to face her.

"Yes," Reed said.

Dr. Fox paused as if she was searching for the right words to say.

"Be careful out there, okay? If you come face to face with whoever or whatever committed these murders, just know that they must have great strength to cause the ripping wounds that are apparent on the bodies. Considering that with the other unexplained facts—" Pausing, Dr. Fox walked out from behind her desk and looked at Reed intently. "Just be careful."

"I will, Doctor," Reed said, looking at the Doctor in a new light. Having a friend outside of the force didn't feel like such a bad thing. There was a pause as the two continued to look at one another in silence.

Dr. Fox was first to break their break from reality. "Well, I will let you know if I happen to discover anything else that might be of some help to you," she said as she walked behind her desk and started shuffling the file papers back into their folder with a nervous jitter.

“Thanks again,” Reed said, watching her.

They shared a short smile as Reed finally nodded, and walked out of her office door. As he moved down the corridor, he continued to wonder just what the hell was happening in New Orleans.