

Unexpected Paths

Reed's Realm

“Home sweet home,” Reed said as he walked into his office at headquarters and flipped on the lights. He made his way over to his desk and placed the paper bag that he had been carrying in one hand down and continued over to the window that looked over downtown.

It was a beautiful morning. The streets were alive with people going about their days. He often thought that people just needed to slow down and enjoy life more. Of course he knew those were words that he could never say out loud to anyone, because he was more so a work-a-holic than those he watched through his window. It was only moments like these, while enjoying his coffee before it got too cold, when Reed stopped to gaze out at the city and slow down to any degree.

Reed took one more drink of his latte before having his tranquil pause interrupted by the sound of his office phone ringing. He turned and walked over to his phone and looked at the caller I.D. that only displayed the word “UNAVAILABLE”, without a number listed. Even though Reed didn’t feel the huge urge to respond to the unknown caller, he reluctantly answered the phone anyway.

“Hackman, homicide division,” he announced.

“Let me get this straight. The almighty Reed Hackman not only needs help, but is now looking to me to save the day?” a familiar voice spoke. “Are you up shit creek without a paddle *again*?”

“Could you remind me of the last time I visited shit creek? For some reason, that particular event is not coming to mind,” Reed returned.

“Two words, pal, Tammy Michaels,” the voice spoke with confidence.

“Hey, that was not my fault. How was I supposed to know the she was the director’s daughter? Besides, I was married, nothing happened, it was only a few drinks,” Reed said, enjoying defending himself.

“Besides, if that was shit creek, I was only in it because someone begged me to go and be his wing man that night,” Reed added.

“You may have me there, Reed,” the voice said with a laugh.

“Joe, how the hell are you?” Reed asked of his old FBI buddy.

“Same old, same old, you know,” Joe replied. “How ‘bout you?”

“You know me, I just keep fighting the good fight,” Reed responded. “And speaking of the good fight, I sure could use your help.”

“Well, if I can, you know I will. What’s going on?” Joe asked.

“I have a couple of murders on my hands that have more questions surrounding them than possible answers. There are some very strange elements to both cases. I was hoping that you might be able to search the FBI database and see if there are any records of similar cases documented,” Reed explained.

“I can’t make any promises, but I will check it out for you,” Joe said. “Why don’t you give me the low down on these two cases and I will do a wide grid national search.”

“That would be awesome, but I was wondering if you could speak to the medical examiner who is working the cases with me. She knows the right things that need to be looked for in your search,” Reed stated.

“That’s no problem, do you have her number,” Joe asked.

“Yes. Her name is Dr. Dana Fox and her number is 555-7264,” Reed said. “I told her that you would be in touch.”

“Okay, brother, I will give her a call and see what I can come up with,” Joe said.

“I can’t thank you enough, Joe. I really appreciate it.”

“Don’t mention it. Hey, be careful out there,” Joe said. “And I’ll let you know if the search turns up anything.”

“Thanks, and you watch your ass out there too,” Reed said as he ended his call with Joe.

Reed was happy to hear from his old friend again. Unfortunately, he could not deny the guilty feelings he still had for leaving the FBI, and then not keeping in touch with Joe as he promised.

During his conversation with Joe, the red message light on his phone lit, indicating he had a message. He reached over and hit the speaker button on his phone, then the message button. As the message began playing, Reed reached into the brown paper bag on his desk, pulled out his now cooled beignet, and took a bite.

The phone message lady said, "Message one sent today at 9:24 am."

"Reed, it's Smith down at the crime lab. I think that we may have got lucky on the Simmon's case. I was able to find and pull a print off one of the silver buttons on Simmon's wallet. I am going to run it through AFIS and see if I am holding your golden ticket. Give me a call when you get this. I might have some results by then."

Reed put down the beignet and picked up the phone, excitedly dialing Smith's extension.

"Crime Lab," the familiar vice of Officer Smith greeted Reed as the man answered the phone.

"Hey, it's Reed. Please tell me that you have some good news for me," he said.

"Well, I don't know where to start, Reed. We've run into a bit of trouble. I'll start with the good news first." Smith paused and Reed could here a rustle of papers. "I ran the print through the Automated Fingerprint Identification System as I said I was going to, and it actually found a match," he said.

"You're kidding me," Reed said with surprise. "Who is this person?"

"The fingerprint belongs to David Willings," Smith answered.

"Oh, man I can't thank you enough. This is huge," Reed said. "Can you fax me his profile work up? I want to get this guy yesterday."

"I'll fax you the profile, but you need to go back farther than just yesterday, I am afraid," Smith stated.

"What do you mean?" Reed asked. He didn't like the troubled tone in the other officer's voice.

"According to our records, David Willings died in a boating accident in the Gulf of Mexico in 1998," Smith said.

"What?!" Reed said looking at the phone in shock. "That's impossible. There must be some mistake."

"That's the troubling part that I was telling you about, Detective. It doesn't seem to be a mistake at all," Smith said. "We've checked and triple checked. The fact is that we have the finger print of a man that died several years ago on the wallet of a man that died a few days ago."

Reed's fax machine beeped and the David Willings profile started to print out. Reed reached over and picked up the first sheet of paper and looked it over while he was still on the line with Smith.

"I got the fax," Reed said, preoccupied by the paper he now held in his hands.

"I don't know what else to tell you," Smith said.

"There's nothing else you could say, I guess. I appreciate your hard work on this," Reed returned.

"You're welcome. I just wish I could have given you the info with no strings attached," Smith responded.

"I appreciate your efforts. You guys keep up the good work down there." Reed said.

"Will do. You be careful out there and good luck with the case," Smith said.

Reed hung up the phone and rolled his chair under his desk and placed the fax in front of him, studying every word on the document.

He once again read the date of death and then the cause. He placed his right hand on his forehead and shook it, not believing what he was reading, and beginning to wonder why every door that he found in this case turned out to be a dead end.

As quick as the disbelief filled him, Reed began feeling some degree of hope as he started to read the medical examiners notes at the bottom of the report.

"Wait a minute—" Reed said, trying to grasp what he was reading—"No, that couldn't be."

Reed stood up from his chair and walked once more to the window. Even though the city was laid out in front of him, he didn't notice one detail about what was happening outside his office. His thoughts were lost, wandering, elsewhere. He rubbed his eyes before running his hand slowly down his face, settling it over his lips.

Reed snapped himself back to reality and moved back to his desk with a purpose. He picked up his phone and dialed Martin's extension.

"Johnston, Homicide," Martin said as he answered his phone.

"Martin, could you come to my office?" Reed asked.

“I’ll be right there.”

Reed looked up from the documents spread across his desk when Martin entered his office. “Shut the door behind you, Martin.” The muscled black man pushed the door shut, then walked over and sat down in the chair that faced Reed’s desk.

Reed pulled up the profile for Willings on his computer and printed out two pictures of his mug shot.

“What’s up, Boss?” Martin asked.

“I just spoke to Smith. They found a finger print on Jo Jo’s wallet.”

Martin’s eyes lit up and he leaned forward in his chair, giving his full attention to Reed. The detective could only imagine that Martin had the same look on his face as Reed did when Smith had started their conversation moments ago.

“They ran it through AFIS and got a match,” Reed said.

“You’re kidding me,” Martin said.

“This is our number one suspect wanted for the murder of Jonathan Simmons, and also wanted for questioning in the murder of Peter Kerigan,” Reed said as he reached over and picked up the two freshly made mug shot photos of Willings that were sitting in the tray of his printer. He handed one to Martin and sat the other on his desk.

“So you think he’s also connected to the Kerigan murder as well?” Martin asked.

“Yes, Dr. Fox said that there were too many factors that were the same for the two deaths not to be related, but she also thinks that the murders were committed by two different people. Taking into account all the similarities, I believe that Willings can also lead us to Kerigan’s killer as well,” Reed added.

“David Willings, huh?” Martin said after taking a glance at the picture. “You know he just looks like a crazy ass doesn’t he? Talk about a face only mamma could love. I mean, damn!”

“You’ve got a point,” Reed said. “Look, we have to take this serious. We have to find this guy and find him now.”

“Sorry, I just love it when these things start to come together, you know,” Martin said.

“Well, it is not together yet. We’ve got to find him,” Reed replied.

Martin stood up and walked over to the door and started to pull it open. “Then what are we waiting for? Let’s go get the warrant issued and the APB out to the boys on patrol, and get this guy,” Martin said.

“Wait,” Reed interrupted. “We can’t do that.”

“Oh, yes we can, let’s get to it,” Martin said.

Reed stood up and raised his voice. “Martin, close the door and have a seat.”

Martin looked a little surprised at Reed’s tone.

“Please,” Reed said.

Martin slowly closed the door. All the excitement that had filled his expressions had now been drained out of his body, replaced with confusion.

“I don’t understand,” Martin said as he returned to his chair and sat down. “You said this is our guy right?”

“Yes, I did,” Reed answered.

“Well, let’s go get him,” Martin said. “That is what you said we had to do right?”

“That’s right, and when I said we, I meant you and I. We have to find him and get him on our own,” Reed explained.

“I don’t understand,” Martin said still puzzled.

Reed picked up the full profile for David Willings that was turned over on his desk face down. He handed it to Martin. Martin gave it a glance and looked back at Reed.

“Read it,” Reed told him. “All of it.”

Martin took in a breath and settled back into his chair, still obviously not understanding what was happening. Like the soldier that he was, Martin began to read the report as asked.

Reed sat and waited for the moment that he knew would come. He didn't have to wait long. A sudden transformation occurred in Martin's expression. His eyes squinted and shifted repeatedly over and over the same place on the page before he finally looked up at Reed.

"Reed, this guy is dead," Martin said. "This can't be our man."

Reed didn't offer any explanation, only spoke one sentence to him. "Keep reading."

Martin looked back down at the report. The room became still and quiet as he finished.

Martin looked up at Reed. "Are you thinking what I think you are?" Martin asked.

"Probably," Reed replied.

"It says Willings' body was never recovered. He was lost at sea and presumed dead. But you don't think he is do you?" Martin asked.

Reed shook his head. "No, I don't. I think he is alive and well and in our city," Reed answered. "And we have to go find him."

"Why not still put out a warrant for—" Martin stopped in mid sentence.

Reed knew he had finally put the pieces together. "Now you're seeing it, aren't you?"

"We can't get a warrant for the arrest of a dead man can we?"

"Something tells me that the DA wouldn't understand," Reed said.

Martin, confusion still on his face, looked up at Reed.

"You ready to go and catch a ghost?" Reed asked.

"How are we ever supposed to do that? I don't even know where to start with that," Martin said.

"We do it like we always do. We hit the streets and take our search to the people. No one knows the streets like you do." Reed got up and walked around the desk, leaning back on it in front of his friend. "We go and find the people who see everything from the dark corners where they hide until we find Willings' trail. Then we get on his ass and we don't let up until we have him under our foot. That's how we do it," Reed stated.

“Just tell me what you want me to do and it’s done,” Martin said

“I want you to cover the port. Get a good feel for the area. Blanket the warehouses and workers. You never know when we might get lucky and have someone recognize his mug shot,” Reed said, picking up said item and waiving it for emphasis. “We can only assume that this guy has some knowledge of these warehouses. I will come down and join when I am finished.”

“Where are you heading?” Martin asked.

“I’m going to go back down to Drake’s and see if anyone recognizes Willings’ mug shot,” Reed responded. “Does this sound like a good plan?”

“You’re the, Boss,” Martin said, standing up and walking over to the door pausing before opening it. “Do you think that we are really going to find this guy out there somewhere?” he asked Reed.

“No, Martin, I don’t *think* we’re going to get him,” Reed said as he walked over to face Martin. “He’s out there somewhere, and I *know* we are going to get him.”



Maggie's World

Maggie leaned forward with her elbows on her knees, resting her head in her hands. She’d been sitting on a bus bench a block away from the New Orleans Police Department for more than three hours. If she hadn’t been out with Stephan the night before, she would have had plenty of stamina. As it was, she felt like she hadn’t slept in a month.

The sun had also been beating down on her for at least two hours, and the late autumn day was only getting hotter. The bus shelter where she’d been waiting had a tin roof overhead, but it was only now providing her with relief from the sun. Maggie was glad that she wore a light T-shirt and shorts for this mission.

If needed, when she couldn’t blend in with her surroundings, she purposely dressed like a tourist. The normal city visitors weren’t out in force on a weekday afternoon, not to mention away from the French Quarter, but she could still pass for one without too much questioning.

Reed Hackman lived a boring life as far as she could tell. He'd arrived at the station bright and early, and had been holed up inside ever since. Maggie had been monitoring his internet activity periodically since he'd been at work. Surprisingly, Hackman had briefly visited the Drake Carved Wood website. So she might not have known what he was doing, but he was thinking about the Family. He'd also checked email and read a couple of articles on CNN. Otherwise, whatever he was doing must have been on paper. For all the hi-tech spying available to her—Maggie enjoyed the astounding capabilities of her pocket PC—there was only so much peeking a person could do in a police station without getting arrested.

Maggie found herself looking forward to tonight, when she planned to follow the detective home. She'd be able to get a much more intimate picture of who he really was at that point. Probably not a lot of light would be shed on where his investigation was leading, but she wasn't sure she cared. Whether she spied on him or not, she could only hope that he didn't find anything further to link the Kerigan and Simmons murders back to the Drake Family. Hackman finding nothing would be best for all parties involved, and especially the detective. Maggie had her own reasons for wanting to know more about him.

As if summoned by her thoughts, Hackman emerged from the secure door at the side of the police building and walked toward her. His early arrival had given him a prime parking space, so within a few steps he was in his car. Maggie scrambled to her own.

Traffic around the station was moderate. It gave her enough room to follow him with a couple of other cars in between. The officer drove the black sedan like he was on a police chase, minus the lights warning the public that he was coming their way. He moved fast and aggressively, forcing her to run at least one light. Luckily, the person in front of her had as well.

Maggie noticed immediately that they were headed toward Drake Carved Wood. She let Hackman continue on the main road that would lead him to her little corner of the French Quarter. Maggie, however, peeled off and began breaking traffic laws left and right as she sped through the city.

After running her third red light, Maggie pulled into the alley behind the store, pulled into the garage, and sprinted for the door.