

The Right Questions

Maggie's World

Maggie tapped her pen against the desk in the business office of Drake's Carved Wood, trying to catch her breath. Detective Hackman would be walking in the front door at any moment. She needed to be calm and collected when she talked to him, and at the moment, she felt anything but. Only moments ago she'd been following him through the streets of New Orleans.

Her little stalking trip hadn't garnered her much information. It only made her more nervous, in fact. Now she'd have to report this back to her father and hope that he didn't escalate his little war any farther to include the police. Whether it was with their family business issues or the murder investigation, her father had much more confidence that things would turn out in the Drake Family's favor than she did. She couldn't acknowledge like he did that their way of life could end in a bloody mess, then go on about her life. The specter of a war with The Company hung in her mind like a fog and the murder investigation only added more distortion to that. She wished she could brush off the pressure, but it wasn't in her nature.

The bell above the front door rang out like a siren in the empty office. She took another deep breath and looked down at the stacks of bills on the desk that she needed to pay, and shook her head. Hopefully she'd be able to concentrate enough later to get done what needed to be done. Hopefully no one important, including her, would be in jail.

Maggie entered the showroom, pausing in the doorway as she saw the man walking toward her. Good looking, rugged, and all kinds of trouble: Detective Reed Hackman. She was hoping that the first time she'd seen him had also been the last. Unfortunately, she wasn't that lucky.

"Can I help you, Sir?" Maggie asked, then paused, and looked at him as if she didn't know him. "Detective Hackman?" He had black sunglasses on and his sandy hair was combed back perfectly. Unlike most police detectives she'd met over the years, he didn't look like an unmade bed. He wore a high end blue shirt with a white collar and white cuffs, and perfectly pressed tan slacks.

The detective took off his sunglasses. "Yes. I came and spoke to you a few days ago about the homicide that took place in an empty

warehouse that your company owns down at the port,” Reed responded.

“Have you found the person that killed the poor man in our warehouse?” Maggie asked.

“It’s funny that you ask that. I was hoping that you might be able to lead me in the right direction,” Reed answered.

Maggie closed the distance between them, stopping awkwardly in front of the detective. She thought about her next words carefully. “I hope I can too, but I don’t see how I could.”

“Well, we have caught a pretty good break in the case. Our crime lab was able to find and pull a fingerprint off one of the buttons of the victim’s wallet. It could have only been left by the person who had been there and murdered him. We also found a partial shoe print. It seems like the shoe imprint is possibly a print made from a custom made shoe. We are looking into that as well.

“The finger print that we ran came back with a 100% match. It belonged to this man,” Reed reached into the file that he was holding in his hand and pulled out a mug shot. “His name is David Willings. Does his name, or photo look familiar to you, Ms. Drake?”

Maggie did her best to contain any reaction. She took a slow, but as close to normal breath as possible as she felt her heart begin to race. Taking the picture from the detective, she looked at it closely. It had probably been taken at least twenty years before based on the poor quality of the image. There was no mistaking, though, who was in the photo. Even with his hair grown out to his shoulders and a fu manchu mustache, she recognized Marco Breaux.

“No, I don’t think I know him,” she said, looking back up to Detective Hackman.

The detective took the picture as she handed it to him. “Pardon me for asking again, but are you sure you have never seen this man before?” Reed asked again, studying her.

“I don’t think so. Not that I would remember everyone I meet around here. New Orleans is a busy place,” Maggie responded, smiling.

The detective returned her smile and shrugged. “I thought that maybe you had seen him around the port. There were no real visible signs of forced entry on the warehouse, which led me to think that it is

plausible that Willings was pretty familiar with this particular warehouse at least," he explained.

Maggie shook her head. "Not that I recall. Despite the hair and cheesy mustache, this guy is pretty handsome, so I'd probably remember him if I'd met him."

"I will have to definitely defer that observation to you, however, something tells me that this is not the kind of character that your father would appreciate you bringing home," Reed said, smiling even wider.

"You must not know my father. He'd probably fall to his knees in joy if I brought anyone home," Maggie said, with a little laugh. "Even this guy." The detective chuckled with her. They slid into a strangely comfortable silence. He had the deepest green eyes, like wet grass in the morning. With all his other nice features, she hadn't noticed them the first time they'd met.

"Ah, yeah—" Detective Hackman said, clearing his throat and snapping her from her thoughts. "I don't want to keep you, Ms. Drake. I only have a few more questions for you," he said, his words staggered oddly.

Maggie shifted on her feet. "Please, call me Maggie," she said. She wondered momentarily why she'd given such a peace offering. She reminded herself that this man was her enemy.

"Okay," Reed said. "Well, Maggie, I was also wondering if your company employed anyone to watch over your empty warehouses that are on the port? Just curious about who all has official access to the warehouse," Reed inquired.

The Drake Family had many people who monitored their property on the docks. Part of the purpose of maintaining the warehouses was to provide covert locations for their business dealings. Having the area frequented by some people on the lower rungs of society, who wouldn't likely be missed by many, also provided its advantages. Not that she wanted to disclose that to the New Orleans Police Department.

"My father is really responsible for that. I believe he has a gentleman that provides maintenance at our estate and for the properties we own. I guess it might be time to hire someone specifically for security," Maggie told him.

“Sounds like I am asking the right questions, but to the wrong person,” Reed said as he placed the mug shot that he still held in his hand back into the folder. “Could you please tell me how I could reach your father?”

***Well, shit!* Maggie thought. She had hoped to steer this meddlesome policeman away from her father, and she’d done exactly the opposite. “That’s a good question. He travels a lot.”**

“I am sure that your father is a very busy businessman. At the same time, I am sure you can appreciate my responsibility to try to get to the bottom of this murder that happened on your property,” Reed added. “Is there someone I could call to set up a meeting with him? I am of course willing to work with his schedule, but this is time sensitive as well, and I am sure your father wants this matter to be taken care of as quickly and quietly as possible.”

Maggie nodded. “Of course. I should be in touch with him tonight. I can talk to him about this and set up a meeting between the two of you. I have your phone number.”

“I sure would appreciate that. I’ll look forward to hearing from you soon, I hope,” Reed added. “I also appreciate your time. I’ll let you get back to work.”

She was already trying to form a plan to tell her father about this development. Given his come what may attitude of late, she didn’t know if he would be mad, or ambivalent. “I can call you this evening if it won’t disturb your wife, Detective Hackman” she said.

A shocked look passed over the detective’s face, then quickly disappeared. Maggie couldn’t help but let her eyes drift down to his left hand holding the manila folder to see that there was no ring on it. She felt shocked at herself for even wondering about whether or not the man was married.

“If you are able to speak with your father and get back with me tonight that would be great. If not, just whenever you are able to set it up, let me know,” the detective said, his fair skin reddening slightly. “There is no need to worry about disturbing my wife. I highly doubt you would do that seeing that I’m not married. As for my ex-wife, feel free to call and hang up as much as you would like!” he said, smiling again.

Maggie laughed, “Okay.”

The detective took a step back. "I should be going. Thanks again for your time," he said, moving towards the door.

"I'll see you out," Maggie said, walking beside him.

As they approached the door, Maggie opened it for him. The handsome policeman reached down and pulled his sunglasses off his pocket and placed them back on his face.

"Thank you," the detective said as he passed by Maggie and out the door. Before she could close it behind him, he stopped and turned to her again. "Reed," he said to her.

"What was that, Detective?" Maggie asked.

"Reed," he repeated. "That's my first name. Feel free to just call me Reed, okay?"

"Okay, Reed. I'd like that," Maggie said with a smile. Against her will, it was true.

Reed turned and started walking back towards his car.

Maggie watched him walk away for a moment before finally closing the door.



Reed's Realm

The familiar sound of the door bell met his ears as Reed once again walked into Maggie Drake's furniture store. Reed glanced around, not seeing anyone in the store, including Miss Drake. He walked toward the back of the store where the check out desk and office were.

Reed had almost reached the back desk when Maggie Drake walked out of the back office. He could not help but notice Maggie's appearance. She was wearing black slacks and a fairly tight fitting white buttoned blouse. She had her dark hair pulled back into a single French style braid, her bangs floating around her face. She didn't wear much make up and she didn't need it. Wisps of dark eyeliner helped accentuate her dark brown eyes.

"Can I help you, Sir?" Maggie asked, then paused, and looked at him as if she didn't know him.

As she spoke Reed reached up and took off his amber toned Oakley sunglasses.

“Detective Hackman?” Miss Drake asked.

“Yes, I came and spoke to you a few days ago about the homicide that took place in an empty warehouse that your company owns down at the port,” Reed responded.

“Have you found the person that killed that poor man in our warehouse?” Maggie asked.

“It is funny that you ask that, I was hoping that you might be able to lead me in the right direction.” Reed answered.

Maggie stepped closer, stopping awkwardly between them. “I hope I can too, but I don’t see how I could,” she added.

Reed smelled a hint of the perfume that she was wearing. He had no idea what the name of the fragrance might be, as he didn’t consider himself the perfume and flowers buying type. That might have been one of the reasons he found himself romantically unattached. No matter the name of the perfume, Reed decided that he liked the exotic smell very much.

Reed realized he was staring at her. “Well, we caught a pretty good break in the case,” Reed said as he gathered his thoughts back to order. “Our crime lab was able to find and pull a finger print off one of the buttons of his wallet. It could have only been left by the person who had been there and murdered him.”

Reed could tell that what he was saying was sparking a certain amount of interest. He continued, “We also found a partial shoe print. It seems like the shoe imprint is possibly a print made from a custom made shoe. We are looking into that as well.

“The finger print that we ran came back with a 100% match. It belonged to this man,” Reed reached into the file that he was holding in his hand and pulled out the mug shot.

“His name is David Willings. Does his name or photo look familiar to you, Ms. Drake?” Reed asked handing the photo to her.

When Maggie took the picture, a brief moment of something—perhaps surprise—flashed across her face.

“No, I don’t think I know him,” she said, looking back up and handing Reed the mug shot.

Her voice sounded confident, but her strange expression made Reed wonder if she was being honest.

“Pardon me for asking again, but are you sure you have *never* seen this man before?” Reed asked studying, her every movement and glance for tell-tell signs of deception.

“I don’t think so. Not that I would remember everyone I meet around here. New Orleans is a busy place,” Maggie responded, smiling.

Reed didn’t want her to feel as if he thought she was being dishonest. After all, he wanted her help and had a feeling she might be instrumental in solving this case. He wished he could be sure she was telling the truth.

“I thought that maybe you had seen him around the port. There were no real visible signs of forced entry on the warehouse, which led me to think that it is plausible that Willings was pretty familiar with this particular warehouse at least,” Reed explained.

Maggie shook her head. “Not that I recall. Despite the hair and cheesy mustache, this guy is pretty handsome, so I’d probably remember him if I’d met him.”

“I will have to definitely defer that observation to you, however, something tells me that this is not the kind of character that your father would appreciate you bringing home,” Reed said, smiling at her.

“You must not know my father. He’d probably fall to his knees in joy if I brought anyone home,” Maggie said, with a little laugh. Her eyes brightened when she smiled. “Even this guy.” Reed couldn’t help but laugh with her.

A momentary silence followed that Reed thought should have been uncomfortable. With her smiling at him and looking into his eyes, he didn’t feel troubled at all.

“Ah, yeah,” Reed said as he snapped back into business mode, clearing his throat.

“I don’t want to keep you Miss Drake. I only have a few more questions for you,” Reed said trying not to fumble his words.

Maggie shifted on her feet. “Please, call me Maggie,” she said.

“Okay,” Reed said. “Well, Maggie, I was also wondering if your company employed anyone to watch over your empty warehouses that are on the port? Just curious about who all has official access to the warehouse,” Reed enquired.

“My father is really responsible for that. I believe he has a gentleman that provides maintenance at our estate and for the properties we own. I guess it might be time to hire someone specifically for security,” Maggie said.

“Sounds like I am asking the right questions, but to the wrong person,” Reed said as he placed the mug shot back into the folder.

“Could you please tell me how I could reach your father?” Reed asked.

“That’s a good question. He travels a lot,” Maggie answered.

Reed found her sudden lack of knowledge to be curious. Maggie seemed to be operations manager for Drake Enterprises. For whatever reason, though, it appeared that he needed to talk to Drake himself.

“I am sure that your father is a very busy business man. At the same time, I am sure you can appreciate my responsibility to try to get to the bottom of this murder that happened on your property,” Reed stated.

Maggie looked unexpectedly flustered. Reed wondered what sort of relationship she had with her father.

“Is there someone I could call to set up a meeting with him? I am of course willing to work with his schedule, but this is time sensitive as well, and I am sure your father wants this matter to be taken care of as quickly and quietly as possible,” Reed added

Maggie nodded. “Of course. I should be in touch him tonight. I can talk to him about this and set up a meeting between the two of you. I have your phone number.”

“I sure would appreciate that. I’ll look forward to hearing from you soon I hope,” Reed added. “I also appreciate your time. I’ll let you get back to work.”

“I can call you this evening if it won’t disturb your wife, Detective Hackman,” Maggie said.

Reed could not help but to smile a little. He wondered if she really was worried about disturbing his possible wife, or if it was just a way to find out if he was married or not.

“If you are able to speak with your father and get back with me tonight that would be great, if not just whenever you are able to set it up, let me know,” Reed said, hoping for once in his life he could control the blush he felt on his cheeks as he continued. “There is no need to worry about disturbing my

wife. I highly doubt you would do that seeing that I'm not married. As for my ex-wife, feel free to call and hang up as much as you would like!" Reed said finding himself smiling again and asking himself if he had just said that out loud.

Maggie laughed, "Okay."

"I should be going. Thanks again for your time," Reed said moving toward the door.

"I'll see you out," Maggie said, walking beside him.

As they approached the door Maggie opened it for him. Reed reached down and pulled his sunglasses off his pocket and placed them back on.

"Thank you," Reed said as he passed by Maggie and out the door. Before she could close it behind he stopped and turned to her again. "Reed," he said looking back at her.

"What was that, Detective?" Maggie asked.

"Reed," he repeated. "That's my first name. Feel free to just call me Reed okay?"

"Okay, Reed," Maggie said with a glowing smile.

Reed smiled back before he turned and started walking to his car.