

# Bargaining Chips

## Reed's Realm

Every city has parts where a person wouldn't want to find himself having car trouble or wandering around lost at night. In those parts of the city, even the street cops drive a little fast when they go through. New Orleans was no different. If anything, it seemed to attract an extra layer of crazies that not only survived, but flourished in the most dangerous neighborhoods.

Some of the worst areas were the low lying neighborhoods that were a few blocks away from the docks. These neighborhoods were scary enough during the day, and as you drove through them during the daylight hours when things were at their best, there were still plenty of tell-tell signs of the kinds of things that went on at night. Every house and business had windows and doors covered in bars or mesh, so it looked as if the streets were lined with small prisons. Only these small run down, owner-made prisons were constructed not to keep the undesirables locked in, but to keep them locked out. Even more disturbing was the fact was that it would be a lot safer to walk through San Quinton than it would be to walk these streets at night. After the sun went down, a completely different breed of life came out to roam.

"You know, I just don't understand where all these people hide during the day," Martin said. He and Reed were sitting in Reed's car, parked across the street from the Fairmont Motel.

"I mean, you see people out during the day, but they are mostly worn down people that don't have anything and never did. Then you drive through the same part of town at night and there are freaks everywhere. I mean look at all the hookers walking around," Martin continued.

Reed couldn't disagree or explain. "My guess would be that during the day, most of them are sleeping off what they did the night before. Either that or they are waiting their turn at the free clinic to get some kind of treatment, or asking the doctor what might be the cause of that terrible itching and burning sensation they have been experiencing *down there*," Reed speculated.

"Okay! Okay! That was a little more information than I really need," Martin said as the picture Reed had painted in his head made him squirm a little in the front seat.

Reed tapped both thumbs on the stirring wheel. "This is the part of the job I hate. Just sitting and waiting for something to happen. It's like looking at a watch and counting the seconds of your life as they tick away while the

**whole world is turning around you. And yet here we are sitting in the car watching hookers try to snag John's. Sometimes I wonder what the hell I was thinking, honestly. I could have been a lawyer or something, for God's sake," Reed spoke.**

**"Hey, I know what you mean. I'm not one for just sitting around either. I would rather be in the action," Martin said. He looked down at the dashboard clock, then back to the hotel door upon which they focused. "Speaking of action, we have been here for over an hour and there have been no signs of any life in that room. How long do we wait before we make a move?" Martin asked.**

**"I was hoping that we might get lucky and catch him leaving so we could tail him and then take him down in a less populated spot. We would also have a better idea of what weapons he might be carrying. It's really dangerous to just walk up to the door." Reed looked at his watch and shook his head. "If he's not in there, then he'll get tipped off that we're looking for him. But if he is inside, then we don't know if he is alone, or whether or not he has an armory of guns and is ready to go down in a blaze of glory. And look at the room. This guy was smart. He got a corner room with the door and a window facing one street, and windows facing the other street. He has great vision around him from inside. Either way, I get the feeling that our luck has just about left us tonight," Reed said.**

**As Reed finished speaking, he noticed a group of people making their way in the toward the corner room.**

**Martin looked to his friend with a smirk. "Maybe our luck hasn't run out quite yet. Check it out."**

**There were four black guys and one girl on the way to the door with 119 on it. As the group approached the door, one of them continued on to the corner, looked around it, and then nodded to one of the others. The apparent leader, a twenty year-old with a red bandana, reached out and knocked on the door.**

**"Did you see that?" Martin asked. "Three knocks, then one knock, followed by two knocks, twice."**

**Reed looked over at Martin, "I sure did. Nice code."**

**The door opened and all five of the young hoods stepped in and closed the door behind them.**

**Martin looked over at Reed. "What do you think is going on? Should we call in backup and swarm the room? Someone is in there and we have to assume that it's TJ."**

**Reed paused for a second, considering. Police work could be handled so many different ways. Some cops were bull headed, gun wielding, egotistical brutes. Those testosterone heavy sorts used the most force possible all the time, every time. They were the kind of policemen who turned up in very unflattering videos on the evening news.**

**Reed liked to think that he was the other kind of cop. A smart one. Sometimes force was necessary, no doubt. There were many times, though, that another, less violent method of attack was needed to do the job.**

**“No, we don’t call anyone. We wait,” Reed responded.**

**Martin stared at the door, a perplexed look on his face.**

**“If I’m right, in a few minutes that door is going to open and at least four of them are going to walk out of that room,” Reed stated.**

**“What makes you say that?” Martin asked.**

**“Just wait and watch. Let’s see if I am right,” Reed responded.**

**They sat in the car and didn’t take their eyes off the room. No other words were spoken between the two. Ten minutes went by with no movement from the room. Looking at Martin’s ever darkening expression drained Reed’s patience.**

**“Come on. Come on,” Reed whispered.**

**Another five minutes went by; nothing.**

**“Man, I don’t know what made you think something was going to happen, but I don’t—” Martin stopped in mid-sentence as the door to room 119 opened. The four guys that had entered the room came out, walking with the swagger of indestructible youth. Two of them went down K Street and the other two started down 53rd.**

**“I’ll be damned,” Martin said as he looked over at Reed. “How did you know that they were going to come out so quick?”**

**“Just think about,” Reed said, shifting to face Martin. “The street punk told us that TJ was in the room cutting and weighing, getting ready for tonight. So that’s what he’s been in there doing.” Reed pulled out his pistol and checked the chamber. “Well, he finally got it finished. He’s not going to hit the streets to risk being caught or shot, so when he gets the product ready, he calls his boys and they come and do his street dirty work.”**

**“And the girl? She didn’t really look like a hooker to me,” Martin asked.**

**“No, I don’t think she was either. I think that could be his girl. That leads me to believe that he is more than likely alone with her in there now,” Reed added.**

**“So what is our move?” Martin asked.**

**“We go up to the door, do the knock, and rush in when there’s movement at the door,” Reed said.**

**“Alright, let’s do it,” Martin said.**

**Reed reached above his head and turned off the car’s dome light so that it would not turn on when they opened the doors to get out. TJ wasn’t likely looking out at them, but being thorough was just another aspect of being smart.**

**“Once we’re out in the open, we’re going to have to close in on that door in a hurry before we’re given away,” Reed started.**

**Martin shook his head in agreement.**

**“Here we go. One! Two! Three!” Reed said as they both got out of the car and headed to room 119. Both Reed and Martin moved fast over the sidewalk with guns drawn in front of them, heading to the door while keeping a close eye on the environment around them. Few people seemed to notice. There were a few prostitutes on the other side of the street. They all just walked the other way, knowing that something was about to go down and that they didn’t want to be anywhere around when it did.**

**The policemen made it to the door with no sign of any occupants being tipped off. Reed put his back against the wall at the right side of the door and Martin took his place at the left. Martin looked over at Reed, who nodded his head in answer. Martin then reached over and knocked on the door. Three knocks, then one, followed by two, twice.**

**“I’m busy. Go away and come back in a few hours,” a male voice said from inside the room.**

**Martin looked to Reed for direction.**

**“Do the knock again,” Reed whispered.**

**Martin did the knock a second time, a little harder than the first.**

**“Damn it! I said go away. I’m busy,” the voice yelled.**

**Martin, his brow furrowed, looked back over to Reed again. Whoever was in the room was not the only one getting irritated.**

**Martin reached out to knock again, but before he could, Reed motioned for him to stop. The time for being gentle had come and gone.**

**Martin watched Reed expectantly. They both took deep breaths, knowing they were both about to put their lives in extreme peril. There was no way to predict what waited on the other side of the door. Reed cocked his gun, shifted his body to the side, and started slamming his fist with maximum force against the hollow metal surface. He banged against the door three times, then one time, then two and once more.**

**“Hey, it’s three, one, two, and then two,” Martin whispered.**

**Reed smirked at Martin, “Who said I was done?”**

**Reed stepped in front of the door, his gun held chest high, and gave the final knock in the form of his left foot kicking the door open. The door exploded inward, almost out of its hinges, and crashed loudly against the wall behind it.**

**Martin bent down and swung into the room with Reed right behind him.**

**“Freeze!” Martin yelled. “Police!”**

**A black man that Reed assumed to be TJ, and the woman they’d seen walk in, were on the bed. They’d been startled apart, both staring wide eyed at the policemen busting in on them. All the curtains were pulled tight and the room was appropriately dim. A worn couch and dresser sat against the adjacent wall. Judging by the tattered surface of both, the weekly rent of the room shouldn’t have been more than fifty bucks. The condition of the bed and other furniture wasn’t much better. TJ reached over the woman for the gun sitting on the night stand next to the bed.**

**“Touch it and the next thing you’ll feel is a bullet in your head,” Reed said to the out stretched man.**

**TJ looked at Reed, but didn’t move any further. His hand was about three inches from the pistol.**

**“You might be fast, but you’re not that fast. It’s over. Slowly back away from the gun,” Reed added.**

**Again, TJ didn’t move. His dark eyes drilled holes into Reed.**

**“Do you want to die!?” Martin yelled. “You won’t get a shot off before you’re dead. You feel me, man?”**

**“Please, TJ. I don’t want to die,” the girl pleaded. She was a frozen like a board under her man.**

**The drug dealer narrowed his eyes and clinched his jaw, then moved away from the gun. He scooted away from the girl and reclined into the far side of the queen sized bed. He kept his hands held up in front of his face.**

**Martin walked to the night stand and picked up the gun.**

**“Cuff them both,” Reed said to Martin, tossing the cuffs he was carrying onto the foot of the bed. “I’ve got you covered.”**

**Martin cuffed both of the suspects’ outside hands to the steel pipe bed head board and their inside hands to one another. There was no way they could get loose. Reed stood with his gun pointed at the two while as Martin secured them. TJ’s eyes never left Reed.**

**As Martin finished, a noise came from the bathroom. Reed swung his aim to the closed bathroom door.**

**“Did you forget to tell me about your friend in the bathroom?” Reed asked.**

**“Man, there ain’t nobody in the bathroom,” TJ said.**

**Reed moved toward the bathroom while Martin stepped into position to cover TJ and his girl.**

**“Yo man, there ain’t nobody in the bathroom,” TJ said, his voice agitated. “What do you want, anyway?” He got no response from Reed. “Hey, I’m talking to you, mother fucker.”**

**Reed and Martin paid him no attention. They knew that TJ was just trying to pull their attention away from the closed bathroom door and whoever was behind it. Reed turned the door knob and with a quick motion and swung the door open.**

**“No man! Stop,” TJ yelled from the bed, struggling against his bindings.**

**Reed paused at the threshold, blocking it. For a few seconds, he just stared into the bathroom processing what he was seeing, before finally looking back over to TJ, who now turned his eyes away.**

**“You son of a bitch,” Reed said as he put his gun away and moved into the bathroom.**

**“Don’t take your eyes off them,” Reed told Martin as he walked into the room.**

**“Hey, what’s going on? You okay?” Martin called out.**

**“Yeah, I’m fine. Just give me a second,” Reed answered.**

**TJ just looked down and didn’t move. His girlfriend was equally as immobile.**

**Reed finally emerged from the bathroom holding a small baby in his arms.**

**“You brought your baby here?” Martin asked TJ.**

**The criminal said nothing, refusing to look the policeman in the eyes.**

**“That’s pretty messed up, even for a drug dealer,” Martin added.**

**TJ finally broke his silence. “What do you want from me?” he asked.**

**“What makes you think that we want something from you TJ?” Reed asked.**

**“For starters, there are only two of you. We’re sitting here cuffed to the bed and not sitting in the back of a police car, so you must want something. Otherwise we’d be in jail already. So what the hell do you want from me?” TJ asked.**

**“That’s what I like about you, TJ. You’re a smart man,” Reed responded. “And to answer your question, all we want is some information.”**

**“Well, you’re wasting your breath, cause you only getting two things from me,” TJ said.**

**“And what would those two things be?” Martin asked.**

**TJ looked over at Martin and then back to Reed. “You’re going to get both Jack and Shit from me!”**

**“Is that right?” Reed asked.**

**“That’s right! I ain’t telling you anything,” TJ said with a laugh.**

**“Oh, I think that you will. As a matter of fact, I’m confident that you will fully cooperate with me,” Reed said, rocking the blanket swaddled infant in his arms. The baby continued to sleep as if he weren’t in the middle of a very dangerous police action.**

**“And what makes you think that?” the drug dealer asked.**

**“Because you want to see your son again,” Reed said. “I have a feeling that you don’t want him to be in foster care, and have your parental rights taken away. Correct me if I am wrong. You know all I have to do is take out my phone and make one call and he is out of your life forever.”**

**TJ didn’t say anything. He just looked down again. The woman beside him started to speak, but stopped when TJ tugged on her arm.**

**“I believe he thinks you’re bluffing,” Martin said.**

**Reed walked over and handed the baby to Martin. The other policeman carefully cradled the small baby in his python sized arms. Reed knew that Martin had next to no experience with children, but holding the baby, no one would ever have known.**

**“Last chance,” Reed said, stepping closer to the bed.**

**TJ still was silent and motionless.**

**“Fine, have it your way,” Reed said as he pulled out his cell phone and opened it up. He dialed a number and then put his phone on speaker.**

**“New Orleans Police Department. If this is an emergency, please hang up and dial 911. How may I direct your call?” the operator asked.**

**“I need to be connected to child protective services,” Reed requested.**

**“Please hold for a moment while I transfer your call, sir,” the operator said in an even tone. The phone started to ring again.**

**“TJ—,” the girl on the bed pleaded. The drug dealer still just sat there and did nothing.**

**“Child Protective Services, this is Jody. How may I help you?” the new voice on the phone asked.**

**“Alright, I’ll do it. Just don’t turn my baby in,” TJ said, finally looking up to Reed, his eyes softer than they had been.**

**“I am sorry, sir. Could you repeat that. I could not quite understand you,” the voice on the phone spoke once more.**

**Reed looked into TJ’s eyes.**

**“Sir, are you there?” the voice asked.**

**“I’m sorry. I accidentally dialed the wrong number. My mistake,” Reed said into the phone and then flipped it closed.**

**“So what do you want from me?” TJ asked.**

**Reed reached into his inside coat pocket and pulled out a folded up sheet of paper. He slowly unfolded it and tossed onto TJ’s lap.**

**“I want him,” Reed said.**

**TJ looked at the picture and then back at Reed.**

**“Is this what this is all about?” he asked. “About Marco?”**

**“So you know this man?” Reed asked.**

**“Yeah, this is a crap-tastic picture of him, but yeah I know him,” TJ said.**

**“You said his name was Marco?” Reed asked.**

**“Yeah, that’s his name,” TJ responded.**

**“What is his last name?” Martin asked.**

**“I don’t know.” TJ said.**

**“What do you know about him?” Reed asked.**

**“He is a dealer, but not like me. I am just a little fish in the pond, and I like it that way. Less mess.” TJ said, shrugging his shoulders and jingling the two sets of handcuffs holding him down. “Marco is a bigger fish. He’s like the middle man that connects the big boss with the guys on the street.”**

**“So he’s your supplier?” Reed asked.**

**“Not directly, but he’s involved.”**

**“Who does he work for?” Reed continued.**

**“How the hell should I know? Look man these are not the kind of people you ask a lot of questions. I don’t care who is running the show and I don’t want to know to be honest because of times like this. If I knew and I gave them up, I would be dead weather I was on the streets or in jail,” TJ explained.**

**“Look, do you know where I can find him?” Reed asked.**

**“Hey, I’ve said enough. I ain’t telling you anymore until I know you are good on your word about my son,” TJ said. He looked at his son with a longing expression.**

**“Just answer my questions yes or no, or the deal is off, TJ. Do you now where I can find this man?” Reed asked again.**

**TJ looked up at Reed once more and with a total anger in his eyes he nodded. “Yes I do, but I’m not telling you until I know my son is safe. That is the deal. Take it or leave it,” TJ demanded.**

**Reed walked back over to Martin and took the baby from his arms. Reed looked down at the baby, who continued to sleep peacefully. He was so innocent and completely unaware of what was going on in the room. The world held so much promise for a little one like this. He was starting with a few strikes against him, but there was still hope.**

**“Uncuff the girl,” Reed said without looking up.**

**Martin did as instructed without question.**

**“Get up and come over here,” Reed said to her.**

**She slowly got off the bed and walked over to where Reed stood. Reed looked back to TJ.**

**“Do you trust this woman TJ?” Reed asked.**

**“Yes, I do,” he said.**

**Reed handed the baby to the woman. She took him and looked back at Reed. He knew by her lack of protest at what had gone on that she was not the little boy’s mother. Even so, she looked at the baby with affection, and would take care of him. She would do so out of fear of TJ if nothing else.**

**“Get out of here,” Reed told her.**

**She looked over at TJ and he nodded to her to go. She then turned and walked out of the motel room.**

**“Thanks man, I appreciate you doing that,” TJ said.**

**Reed walked over to the bed and stood next to TJ, who was still cuffed to the head board. Reed leaned over and picked up the picture of Willings from the bed. He stepped closer to TJ and spoke in a low, soft voice. “Don’t get the wrong idea here. I only let them go so I could find out where to find this man. Truth be known, the thought of you having anything to do with that**

**baby makes me want to throw up. You are scum and I would hate for you to raise your boy, because he would walk in your shadow. So just so we are clear, I didn't do that for you. I did it because I need to find this man and you are going to tell me where he is, and you are going to tell me right now, because that was the deal," Reed said.**

**TJ's eyes turned back to stone with anger. "Helping you is the last thing I want to do, but a deal is a deal," he said. "You can find Marco at Club 9. That's where he hangs out a lot."**

**"Are you lying to me?" Reed asked.**

**"We had a deal and on my son's freedom, I swear I'm telling you the truth," TJ answered.**

**"I can tell you one thing, cop. If you find him, and believe me that is a big if, you will quickly see that you are in way over your head on this one. I just wish I could be there to see the look on your face when you're about to die," TJ added.**

**Reed flipped open his phone and dialed once more. He then turned the speaker function back on as he had done moments before.**

**"New Orleans Police Department. If this is an emergency, dial 911. How may I direct your call?" the familiar voice asked.**

**"Yes, this is Unit NO-377. I am at the Fairmont Motel on 53<sup>rd</sup> and K. My partner and I just apprehended a drug dealer and we are holding him in room 119. We need back up units to our location, please," Reed requested.**

**"Roger NO-377, backup units are on there way," the voice said.**

**Reed closed his phone and turned his attention back to the restrained criminal.**

**"You can just keep wishing, TJ, because the only thing you are going to be seeing are the bars from inside your cell," Reed said as he walked past Martin and over to the door.**

**"And by the way, there are no ifs, ands, or buts to it," Reed said as he looked back over his shoulder at TJ. "I am going to find him."**