

Unexpected Results

Reed's Realm

Reed rose up out of bed and reached for the phone ringing on his night stand. He picked up the screeching device like he was pulling a baby out of a fire, knocking over his closed half consumed bottle of water to the floor.

Reed cleared his throat, "Hello?"

"Reed?" the voiced questioned.

He recognized it right away.

"Dr. Fox," he greeted as he flipped his legs over the edge of the bed, letting both feet rest on the floor beside his bed. He glanced over to his clock, which displayed 5:22 am glowing bright red in the dark.

"I am very sorry for calling you at this hour, but I didn't feel like I had any choice," she explained.

Reed could tell that her voice was cracked a bit and sounded different. It was easy to tell that something was wrong, "Are you okay, Doctor?"

"No, actually, I'm not. I need to speak with you in person. Can you come to my office?" Dana asked.

"Sure I can come by. What time did you have in mind?" he asked.

"Now. I really think that it would be best if you came as soon as possible," she said, her voice warbled with emotion.

Reed, still trying to get his wits about him, heard someone calling her name in the background, followed by something that he could not make out.

"Detective," Dana spoke.

Reed broke his silence. "Yes, of course. Give me about 20 minutes, okay?"

"That will be great. I will see you then. I have to go," she said, then hung up.

Reed stared at the dead phone in his hand momentarily before stumbling to his feet and into the bathroom to get ready.

Reed didn't understand what could be so important to call him out of bed. The woman dealt with dead bodies, for cripes sake. Corpses normally had no problem waiting until the light of day. Something had rattled the Doctor, however, so he recognized the importance of her request. He tried to brush off his annoyance, knowing he was still very tired and had not had his morning cup of coffee.

As he approached the downtown medical examiners office, he muttered low to himself, "This better be something good." As he turned the last corner onto the street that hosted the police headquarters, all the remaining parts of his brain that might have still been partly closed down came to full attention. It only took one look to realize that whatever was happening was nothing good at all, but instead something wrong; very wrong.

He was unable to pull in the front parking lot due to the black and white cruisers that were blocking the entrance, so he parked at the curb in a metered spot. He moved past the machine without a second thought. As Reed made his way up to the front door, it was obvious that he was walking into a working crime scene. Cops were dusting for prints at the front security panels.

Reed walked by the cops working the scene and proceeded directly into the guts of the building and into the elevator. He moved down to the morgue floor and walked passed the officers milling about the hallway there. As he reached the front door of the morgue, he saw Dr. Fox walking his way. She had a very concerned look on her face.

"You made it. Thank God," she said reaching out and touching Reed on his left arm.

"What's going on, Doctor?" Reed asked, his eyes tracking the activity around them. He could see the crime unit taking pictures and dusting for prints in many areas.

"We had a break in," she replied.

"What?" Reed asked in disbelief.

Dana started walking, "Follow me. We are going to have to go in through the side door."

Reed followed her, still looking around and not believing what was going on. He couldn't fathom how the police station had a break in.

"Why would anyone want to break in to the city medical examiners office?" he asked. "I mean that sounds pretty stupid. I just don't see any reason. The risk is unreal."

“Oh, I know the reason already,” she responded. “I know it better than anyone else.”

“What’s it is?” Reed asked.

Dana stopped as they reached the back door. Reed watched as she swiped her pass card and entered a number code onto the keypad. There was a click just inside the door letting them know that her card and code were accepted. She opened the door and turned back to him, but didn’t speak.

“Doctor, what it is?” he asked again.

She looked up into Reed’s eyes. “It’s David Willings,” she said.

Reed was stunned. If this murder investigation could not get any more complicated, he didn’t know how.

“What happened here?” he asked in a very serious tone.

She only responded with, “Follow me, okay?”

Dr. Fox walked down a long hallway and then through an outer office. Reed could hear the sound of many voices talking as they turned. More crime lab techs were taking photos and dusting for prints outside a room. The doctor stopped just before the doorway in which all the commotion was taking place.

“I think you might just want to see it for yourself,” she said, stepping to the side of the hall so he could enter the room.

Reed didn’t have a clue as to what he was going to find in the room. His imagination ranged from seeing an officer shot dead on the floor to his name written in graffiti. His heart started to race as he stepped past Dana and into the larger chamber beyond.

“Oh my God,” Reed spoke out loud. “Please tell me that’s not—” Reed stopped in mid sentence. The sight was overwhelming.

“I’m sorry to tell you this, but yes, that is Willings, or what is left of him, I should say,” Dr. Fox said.

Reed took a few more steps forward, but didn’t utter another word as he got a closer look. There was hardly anything human left to see in what had been Willings body drawer, and there was no way to even know who or what was on the table. The only thing that could be recognized was the remainder of blacked and charred bones that had been Willings’ skeleton, along with a

sand box volume of ashes with other mixed but well burn chunks that used to make up his body.

Reed placed the back of his sleeve that covered his forearm up over his mouth and nose. The smell of burnt flesh that filled the room was almost unbearable.

Reed just stood in shock, his mouth possibly hanging open, before feeling the doctor's hand on his shoulder. "Come on you've seen enough," she said.

Reed took one last look before turning and following Dana out of the room. He wiped his face with his sleeve before lowering it back to his side. He was in a pure daze as he followed her every turn. He had harbored some hope that Willings had been the answer to the murder mystery, and that his killer would be easily explained. It appeared the stakes were much higher than he imagined.

Reed recognized that Dr. Fox had led him the back way through a few labs in order to reach her office. She unlocked the door and opened it for Reed, motioning him in with her hand. He passed through and noticed that not only did she close the door behind her, but locked it as well.

"Please, have a seat," she said as she took her chair behind the desk.

Before Reed could start asking all the questions that were swirling through his head, Dana picked up the phone and hit a few numbers.

"Hey, Lisa, this is Dr. Fox. I have to step out for a few minutes, so could you hold all my calls and take messages," she requested. "Great. I appreciate it."

Dana hung up the phone and looked at Reed, a deadly serious expression still on her face. "This is pretty unbelievable isn't it?" she asked.

"Unbelievable and crazy, I'm so pissed. I mean, just when I think I'm going to get some answers, the rug is pulled out from under me again," he said in an angry tone.

Dana leaned forward, placing her arms on her desk. "Well, I actually do have some things that I would like to share. It's information, but I am not sure what you will make of it. I had completed part of my exam before I left yesterday. However—" she paused without picking back up.

"However what?" Reed asked, still trying to refocus his thoughts.

“However, my findings are unlike anything I have ever seen. I can’t explain them, and would not believe them but for the fact that I personally ran the tests myself,” she added.

Reed was listening to every word spoken, but also kept thinking about why it always had to be something like this. What was up with this case? It was the definition of one step forward and three steps back.

“I just don’t know what to think or do,” she said. “That’s why I called you. I feel like you are the only one I can trust.”

“Well, you can trust me, Dana,” Reed responded.

“I was hoping you would say that,” she returned. “So let me show you what I found.”

Dr. Fox stood up from behind her desk and walked over to a file cabinet. She pulled her keys out of her pocket, quickly found a small key, and opened the top drawer. She took out a large case file packed away in a brown folder and moved back to her desk after sliding the drawer closed giving it a push with her right elbow.

She sat back down and opened the file. “Even though I was not able to complete my exam, I was able to get a lot of information. It brings up a lot more questions that I would have liked to further explore in the internal exam of the body, but at least I was able to gather something,” she said as she pulled out some paperwork and pictures from the folder.

“I will start with the basics and then work on from there,” she asked. “Stop me if you have any questions.”

Reed nodded in agreement and leaned forward in his chair.

“I first ran prints through the database and this is indeed the body of David Willings. Secondly, I took several photos. I will get back to those in a second. I drew a pretty fair amount of blood, which I’m glad about now. I still have a few more tests that I would like to run, but the first thing I wanted to do is check for traces of Bromelain enzyme, which we found in the other two murder victims. Trace tests came back positive for the enzyme, although I wanted to run more test on the possible source of the enzyme,” Dr. Fox said as she flipped one page over and glanced at the next.

“This next test was very interesting. I did a full CDC blood workup on Willings. More specifically his red and white blood cell counts. First you should know that the normal range white blood cell count is anywhere from 6 – 16 million per milliliter. Willings’ level was 29 million per milliliter. As you know, white blood cells are cells of the immune system which defend

the body against infectious diseases. However, they also fight any foreign materials in the body. Having this high number of white blood cells would be a huge indicator that something is very wrong physically and are signs of disease. However, he didn't have or show any possible signs of any illness," the doctor said. "It was as if this was normal for him."

Reed knew he had a puzzled look on his face. He could not totally comprehend where all this was going, but intended on hearing it out.

"Now, red blood cells are the most common type of blood cell and the body's principal means of delivering oxygen from the lungs to body tissues via the blood. A normal red cell count is 4.7 to 6.1 million cells per microliter for a male. His levels were almost double the normal range. This condition could be deadly at this level due to the blood clot factor within the blood," the doctor added. "But again, for him this also would seem to be normal, and that is what is troubleing."

"What does all this mean, Doctor?" Reed asked.

The doctor brought her eyes from the test results to Reed's. "It means that things are really far from normal when it comes to Willings." The doctor looked down at the documents and sat in silence.

"What is it, Doctor?" Reed asked.

Dr. Fox didn't respond. She only drew in a deep breath and walked over to a locked set of cabinets. She once again reached into her coat pocket and pulled her keys out, then unlocked it. She opened it and reached in, pulling out a large x-ray sleeve along with a cd rom case. She then closed the cabinet and walked over to the corner of her desk. She placed the cd rom next to her computer, keeping the brown x-ray sleeve in her hand.

She then motioned with her hand over to the corner of her office. "Please, Detective," she said as she walked over and and flipped a switch on the wall. She pulled out a sheet of x-rays and clipped it to the lighted board.

"This is a chest x-ray of Willings. These well darkened and defined spots are the slugs from the night that you and your partner caught up with him," she pointed out.

Reed studied the images. He had no medical training, but noticed something odd. "What are these spots here?" Reed asked, pointing at four other dark spots that were in the upper right area of Willings' chest.

"You have a good eye, Detective. I wanted to know the same thing," she said, pulling down the current x-ray and pulling out a larger set.

She placed these larger x-rays on the lighted wall. Each sheet of x-rays was comprised of smaller x-rays in boxes like the Brady Bunch intro.

“Those other spots really got my curiosity up. They look to be bullets as well, however, there are two things that caused me to highly question that. First, if these are bullets, then why do they only look like fragments. Secondly,” she paused, walking back over to her desk to pick up something and walking back over to Reed.

She handed him a series of pictures that she had taken of Willings’ body at the beginning of the investigation. She pointed down to the picture of Willings’ upper right chest area.

“If they were bullets or foreign objects that were previously introduced, then why don’t we see signs of scarring in regards to an entry point?” she asked.

Reed studied the picture for a moment and looked over to the doctor. “Maybe he was shot in the back,” he stated.

Dr. Fox reached over and pulled the top picture of Willings away. The second picture was of Willings’ back. “Yes, I thought of that, too,” she responded.

Reed looked down at the picture to see not even a skin blemish, much less a scar of any kind showing a previous injury. His skin looked like that of a pristine twenty year-old.

The Doctor again drew Reed’s attention to the newly placed images on the wall. “After being puzzled myself, I decided to do a CT Scan. These are the results,” she said, looking over at Reed.

Reed felt like he was keeping up with what she was saying, but it seemed that before he had time to make sense of one fact that was placed in front of him, he was hit with another set. His head was racing as he looked at the scan.

“First, let me explain what you are seeing. A CT Scan is not like a regular x-ray. What this machine does is take a cross section of the body and plots it out in an image,” she said.

“A cross section of his body?” Reed asked.

“Yes. Just think about it like a loaf of bread. Each slice of bread is an image on the film,” she added.

“I see,” he responded. “So what am I looking for here?”

“If we look at these series of sections, you will see the discoloration and the introduction of a dark object,” she stated, pointing. “This is a slug from when you or your partner shot him the other night.”

She pointed to the area above the bullet next. “You can see the damage done through each layer and follow the actual path the bullet took before resting.”

Reed could see the bullets and the path within the body that the bullets took in each image as she showed them.

“Now, let’s look over here,” she said, moving over to some of the last frames. “If you look here, you will see the discoloration the same as before. This time you will also see little specks that are around the main object. That is a point of difference.”

Reed studied the frames closely.

“Do you see any other points of difference, Detective?” she asked.

Reed was unsure for what he was supposed to be looking. He could make out the parts of Willings’ chest and the wounds, but he might as well have been looking at images of the moon’s surface. He squinted and tried to make sense of it. Then it hit him. He looked over to the doctor.

“Yes, I do. There are no paths of entry,” Reed stated.

“You are correct. There is no entry way paths, and there is also nothing around these objects that is out of order. It is as if these bullets, if that is what they are, just appeared inside his body from no where, and to make things more interesting, it also seems as if the objects were acutally breaking down inside the body as if to be disolving,” she said.

Reed took a look once more at the x-rays and ran his right hand down the side of his face and over to his chin, before letting it drop back to his side. “So, what does all this mean?” he asked.

Dr. Fox turned and walked back over to her desk.

“Before I get into all that, I have one more thing to show you,” she said, gesturing to the empty chair where he once sat.

Reed followed her direction and took his seat.

Dr. Fox reached into her desk and pulled out a case of cd roms and thumbed through them. She finally grabbed one and inserted it into her computer.

She opened a file and an image popped up on the screen. She then turned the computer screen towards Reed so he could get a better look.

“This is a series of images that were produced by an MRI machine,” she stated.

“So, you did an MRI on his head?” Reed asked.

“Yes I did, but this is not his MRI,” she stated in return.

Reed looked at her confused.

“These are the results of an MRI that came back normal from a different patient. I wanted you to see this first. Pay particular attention to the nasal cavity area,” she said as she reached over and pointed to the area above the upper mouth and below the eyes.

“Okay,” Reed said.

She then ejected the cd and opened the case that she had earlier retrieved when she had got the x-ray and CAT scan results. She slid the cd in the computer.

“This is Willings,” she said. “Remember the area I pointed out?”

The first image loaded on to the screen as Reed was about to answer. However, once his eyes saw the image his instinctual response died on his lips. Finally, his eyes squinted as he tried to decipher the image, he broke the silence. “What the hell?” he said in a low tone of voice.

“That was my initial response as well,” the medical examiner said.

“I need some help here doctor,” Reed said. “Could you explain exactly what I am looking at here?”

Reed, for the first time in several moments, took his eyes off the image on the computer and focused on the doctor. Her face held a blank look.

“You are asking me to explain something for which I have no explanation,” she answered.

“Please give me your best,” Reed said.

Dr. Fox drew in a breath and looked back over to the screen. “Well, if we look at this scientifically, it seems that in the area of the nasal cavity there are two very distinct glands. I can not say what they are, but I have a theory about them,” she said.

“What are those things coming out from the glands?” he asked.

“Well, again I can’t say for sure and I can only speculate and talk in scientific terms, and compare what I am seeing now to what has been concretely proven,” she responded.

“So, you have seen something like this before?” Reed asked.

“I have, but not in a human,” she responded.

“I don’t understand, Doctor,” Reed said sitting back in his chair.

She turned her chair around to face him and leaned over her desk. “If you look at the apparent projecting mechanisms, you will see that they are darker around the edges and lighter in the middle. This moves me to think that these sharp objects are hollow. Also, if you take into consideration the tissue in which they are made, it looks too soft to be a bone. Therefore, I suspect that they are made of a hard catlidge,” she explained.

“But you said you have seen this before, right?” he asked.

“I have, but only in snakes,” she said.

“Snakes,” Reed said, disbelief filling his voice.

The doctor pointed back at the image. “Those glands look very similar to those of a venomous snake, and I am willing to bet if I were able to examine the body, that these two glands, that do not exist in the human body, produce the Bromelain enzyme. These projections that you asked about look like fangs that act like a siringe to inject the blood thinning agent,” she stated.

“Are you serious?” Reed asked as he shifted in his chair in disbelief.

“Please tell me you are not serious!”

“Look, I know how this sounds,” she said.

“It sounds crazy,” he responded.

“I know, but look at the image and tell me what you see?” she asked of him.

Reed didn’t want to look back and responded without doing so.

“I see a botched up test result is what I see,” he said.

“That is what I thought too, so I ran it again,” she spoke as she clicked to the next image.

Over and over she clicked. Reed could see that all of the images turned out the same. Some different views and angles, but they all showed the same disturbing result. He could not stand to look at them anymore.

“Over and over I ran it, but they are all the same,” she explained. “I even ran another person through. A John Doe that had also been brought in the same night,” she said as she clicked the mouse one last time.

“Please look, Detective,” she asked.

Reed stood from his chair and took a few steps. When he reached the wall of the office, he turned around to look back at the computer screen from across the room. He didn’t have to be close to the screen to see that the last image looked like the normal image that she showed in the beginning, proving that the machine was functioning properly.

Reed brushed his fingers through his hair and stood silent.

The doctor ejected the cd and placed it back into the case on her desk.

Shaking his head, Reed drew in a deep breath and kept his eyes tacked to the floor. “I don’t know what to think here,” he said, before finally looking back to the doctor. “You said you had an idea about all this.”

The doctor looked back up at him. “You had better sit back down to hear this,” she said.

His mind and body already disoriented, the detective didn’t have the willpower to challenge her direction. Reed moved back over to the chair and sat down.

“I cannot explain to you what caused these things in this man. I would not even begin to know how to guess. Call it evolution. Call it what you want, but this David Willings was anything but normal. He might have looked that way on the outside, but his insides tell a different story. He had incredible healing abilities and strength,” she explained.

“Not good enough to stop bullets,” Reed added.

“Not to stop them, but he was able to render them useless,” she responded.

“What do you mean, useless?” Reed questioned.

“Oh, yeah, I forgot that part. Willings did die, but not from the gun shot wounds. He died of a toxic acid-like substance that was introduced straight into his heart from the stab wound in his chest. His body had already clotted the gun shot wounds and they had started what seemed to be a rapid healing process,” she said.

Reed just shook his head.

The Doctor looked discouraged as well. “So, whoever stabbed him is the one who did the trick. And I am willing to bet that it was someone who knew about his little secret too.”

“How is that?” Reed asked.

“Think about it. Not only did they know how to kill him, but they also knew what substance to use, and they were able to place it in the right place. Does that sound like a lucky guess to you?” she asked.

“No, it doesn’t. It’s actually starting to make some sense,” Reed said. “Whoever killed him knew who he really was and they knew exactly how to kill him. They had to have known that we were after him, and they were very afraid we were going to get him first. That is why they took the risk of killing him when they did,” he said, organizing the puzzle pieces in his mind.

“As a matter of fact I am willing to bet whoever killed him was the exact same person that broke in here and torched the body. They wanted him dead and they wanted all the evidence that held his secret to be destroyed. What the hell is going on and who the hell are all these people?” he continued, talking as much to himself as the doctor.

“I don’t know, but honestly, I’m scared,” the doctor stated.

“Why?” he asked.

“Well, first is the obvious here with the test results. I mean the last time I ever heard of anything remotely similar to these findings was something that came from the imagination of Stephen King. Then you take into account this person that knew how to kill him and did. Followed by the fact that they broke into a secure city morgue, torched his body, and made it in and out without being seen. They are running huge risks here to destroy evidence. Who is to say that they would not come after me now?” she asked in a shaken tone.

Reed thought for a moment. “Who else knows about your findings?” he asked.

“No one other than you. I ran all the tests myself and locked the results up here in my office. That is why I locked the door and left word to not be disturbed,” she explained.

Reed continued to think. “That is perfect, Doctor,” Reed spoke, looking up at her. “You are actually going to help save yourself.”

“How am I going to do that?” she asked.

Reed gathered all the files and disks and handed the stack to her. “Lock all this back up and come with me,” he said.

She took all the results and once again locked them in the file cabinet before walking over to the door and following Reed out.

In a few minutes they both emerged out of the city morgue and police headquarters, making their way over to the far side of the back parking lot where every local television station had camped out just outside the area taped off by the police.

Reed and Dr. Fox approached the police tape and stopped before crossing.

“We have a statement to make,” Reed said in a loud voice.

A crowd of reporters and camera crews gathered around in front of them like paparazzi flocking to a crashing starlet.

“My name is Detective Reed Hackman of the New Orleans Police Department. As you can see, the department is in the early stages of a crime scene investigation. There was a break in here sometime last night during which evidence was destroyed. We are at this time still gathering evidence in hopes that we can apprehend those that did this and bring them to justice. I will now take a few questions,” Reed stated.

“What evidence was destroyed?” one reporter asked.

“Doctor,” Reed said stepping aside and motioning to his colleague.

“My name is Dr. Dana Fox. A body was destroyed,” she answered.

“Who’s body was it?” another reported asked.

“I’m sorry, but we cannot release that information at this time,” Reed answered.

“Do you know of any reason why someone would want to destroy the body?” a third reporter asked.

“We do not know. We can only assume that the intention was to eliminate evidence related to the crime. I, however, cannot say for sure and will never be able to say because the body was totally destroyed before I had the opportunity to begin an examination,” Dr. Fox answered.

“I’m sorry, but that is all we have at this time. I assure you that we’re working very hard to get to the bottom of this. The NOPD will be more than happy to share that information with you all just as soon as we are able to find some much needed answers. Thank you,” Reed said as he turned and made his way back towards the building.

“How was that doctor?” Reed asked. He was probably going to get in a lot of trouble from his Captain and the public relations officer, but action needed to be taken right away to protect the doctor. Going through the red tape to get approval to make a statement was unacceptable.

“Well, I feel a little better, but to be honest, I am still a little scared,” she said.

Reed stopped and looked over at Dr. Fox, a little surprised at her vulnerability. “Look, I’ll assign a unit to sit outside your apartment when you’re home. We’ll beef up the security here and I’ll even assign you an officer at your office for a while. How does that sound?” Reed asked.

“You can do that?” she asked.

“It’s as good as done,” he responded.

Dr. Fox looked at Reed for a moment, an indecipherable expression on her face. “Thanks, Reed, for everything. I am glad that I have you here on my side of things. I just didn’t know what to do, and still don’t,” she added.

Reed placed his hand on her shoulder. “I don’t know either doctor, but I intend on finding out one way or another,” Reed spoke. “I think you are pretty safe at the moment and I’ll get someone over here as soon as possible. In the mean time, if you need me or find out anything further, just call me on my cell.” Reed removed his hand and took a step back toward the door leading to the parking lot.

“I will,” Dana said.

“Good. Then it sounds like we have a plan,” Reed said as he turned to head to his parked car.

As he opened the door to get out, he looked back and saw that the doctor was still standing in the same spot, a forelorn look on her face. He held the door open with his right arm.

“Don’t worry, we’ll figure all this out,” Reed said. “Everything will be okay.”

He could see her force a smile and a small wave before she turned and walked back toward the morgue.

“At least I hope so,” Reed said, as she disappeared from sight.