

# What Might Be

## Maggie's World

**“Why are we doing this again?” Stephan asked.**

**Maggie looked at him with a wry smile. The evening breeze blew his dark hair and the sun set in a cacophony of orange and red at his back. They sat in weathered wooden chairs atop a three story building adjacent to the police station. A small canopy, and their own efforts, concealed them from any eyes in the building that might stray over to the inconspicuous rooftop.**

**“Drake told me to,” she said, leaning back in her chair and crossing her arms. “You mean you’re not finding this amusing?”**

**He shook his head. “You always amuse me, Maggie. I just didn’t know we were staking out the most boring cop in the history of mankind.”**

**Laughing softly, Maggie couldn’t help but agree. Reed Hackman seemed to be a work-a-holic of the utmost proportions, and they had obviously caught him on a slow day. He’d arrived before seven, left on one call that took him to a burglary scene, and otherwise spent the entire day in the police headquarters. He was probably inside filing out reams of paperwork. Whatever he was doing, it made for uneventful spying.**

**“Look on the bright side,” she told Stephan, “you could be in jail.”**

**He laughed. “Those cops wanted nothing to do with me,” he said.**

**After her morgue mission the day before, Maggie had gone to the aid of her friend after he created a diversion to get her into the building. However, he hadn’t needed any rescuing. Stephan had sobered up immediately when the act was no longer necessary and sweet talked the policemen into letting him go. He had a way with words. Plus, they saw him often enough that they probably didn’t want to bother with him any more than necessary, and certainly not for something so minor as disturbing the peace.**

**Stephan was the least of her worries. Maggie’s mind turned to her father, and his recent state of mind. She wouldn’t say it was deteriorating, really, but she did worry. He’d been nicer to her in the last few months than she recalled him being in his entire life. He’d seemed to settle into a businessman’s world, and to some degree**

**believed the façade he presented to the public. She knew him to be a very different person, and she feared when the real Warin Drake would come back.**

**Jeremiah needed to fear that as well. It wouldn't be beyond Drake to kill the whole lot of that gang. It might take a lot of explaining to make the outward ramifications go away, but she'd known Drake to eliminate people without a care.**

**"What are you thinking about?" Stephan asked, his attention drawn away from the street below.**

**"Drake. He's scaring me," she said.**

**Stephan shrugged. "Don't let him get to you. You might not believe it, but he cares for you."**

**"I don't doubt that, at least to some degree, but it's not me that I'm afraid for. It's everyone else." She shook her dark hair, the soft ends hitting her shoulders like cobwebs. "I feel like something is about to happen."**

**Stephan turned toward her, his usual jester expression gone. "Maybe it is. Don't discount what you feel."**

**"I don't want anything big to happen. I don't hate the way things are right now."**

**"Maybe we need to do something to keep things the same," Stephan said.**

**Maggie had thought and thought about what she should do. Most of her wanted to run away and hide. The rest tried to think of something practical. "We need to get rid of these murder investigations and Jeremiah. You have a magic pill for that?"**

**"Hmmm," he said, furrowing his brow in thought. "That's a tough one." Stephan leaned back into the hard planks of his chair. "Let's frame Jeremiah for the murders."**

**Laughing, Maggie slapped Stephan's knee. "Good thought. How do you propose we do that?"**

**Stephan paused for a few moments. "Well, there are two murders and the police think they're linked to Drake because of the manner of death and the ties to the Family. But that could easily link them to Jeremiah's bunch as well. What we need to do is give the police**

**another body to find, make the death similar to the other two, and leave some definitive evidence pointing to Jeremiah.”**

**Maggie frowned, thinking, but she couldn't come up with a reason why Stephan's plan was not brilliant. Other than the killing someone thing, of course.**

**“Hah! You like that idea, don't you? I'm the shit!” Stephan said, pinching a section of cloth on his shoulder and pulling it out as if he were popping a suspender.**

**“You're something,” she said, shoving his shoulder. “I'll have to think about that.”**

**“Don't think too long. The sooner the police have something else to think about, the sooner they'll stop thinking about Drake.”**

**Maggie knew he was right. Providing another murder victim to Reed would divert his attention if done right. They could target another one of Jeremiah's thugs and get another criminal off the street. It could be a win-win situation. She just wished the idea of it didn't turn her stomach so.**

**“What if we could get Jeremiah to actually kill his own guys?” Maggie asked.**

**Stephan thought for a moment and smiled. “That would be even better. How could we manage that?”**

**“We need to convince him that he has traitors in his camp. I'm sure he'd have no hesitation about cleaning up a mess like that,” Maggie said.**

**Stephan nodded. “I could sweet talk some of his guys into helping us.”**

**“I know you can.” Maggie smiled wider, liking this new plan even more. Stephan had a special ability to convince the weak minded to do his bidding. She had no doubt that many of Jeremiah's men were not strong of the brain.**

**“Do we have a plan, then?” Stephan asked.**

**Looking down at the street below, Maggie nodded. “I think we do.”**



**Having been left alone to stalk her prey by Stephan, Maggie had been thinking a lot. She hated it when she thought too much. It gave her time to ponder about the problems in her life, and to long for what she didn't have. At least when she was in the office working, there was inventory to count and customers to assist. Days at the store were generally busy. Spying on Reed Hackman was boring work.**

**The store was being minded today and indefinitely by other members of the Drake Family. She only hoped that they weren't compromising on prices or being too persistent and driving customers away. In the end it didn't matter, but she had pride in the store and wanted it to continue to do well.**

**Maggie shifted behind the tree providing her cover and came to attention when she saw Reed emerge from between two parked cars. She'd followed him from the police station into the inner parts of the city. She guessed that he was going out for lunch and she'd been right. He was walking into a small café that she'd never noticed before.**

**She knew that she was taking her stalking trade to a higher, much more dangerous level, but she couldn't help herself. Simply watching Reed go about his daily chores gave her enough insight to know that while he was working on the murder cases, he wasn't making any monumental connections. More than that, though, observing his life from a far made her want to be a part of it all the more, even in some small way. She had almost hoped when beginning this assignment that she would see Reed taking under-the-table bribes or kicking puppies in the street so that she could dismiss the romanticized notion of the man that had rooted itself in her head. Of course, she'd seen none of that. Reed seemed to be a hard working policeman who was dedicated to the city more than he was to his own personal pleasure.**

**Maggie stepped from behind her tree covering and followed Reed into the café. It had glass windows across the front showing the quaint interior that probably hadn't changed since the fifties. The small space had a counter in the middle with stools lining it. Against the glass wall sat several booths. Every seating surface was covered in dull red vinyl. Though the years had dimmed the surface, no large tears marred the surfaces.**

**Most of the seats were occupied with New Orleans business types stepped over from downtown for a bit of something different to eat. Reed had taken up residence in a booth three removed from the door, his face buried behind a menu. Maggie hesitated only briefly after walking in the door, and proceeded toward him.**

**She stopped beside his booth, silent for a moment. “Reed, is that you?” she asked.**

**His green eyes moved from the menu to her face. “Maggie, how are you?”**

**Smiling, she shifted on her feet. “I’m fine. Just stopping in for some lunch.”**

**“So am I.” Reed pointed to the other side of his booth. “Please join me,” he said.**

**Maggie beamed from inside out, and silently cursed herself at the same time. This was what she wanted, and what she didn’t need. Nonetheless, she sat down and picked up the menu from the table top. “What’s good here?” she asked.**

**“Oh, anything. I like their homestyle stuff. Too fattening, but it tastes good.”**

**Maggie focused herself on the menu and picked out a dish. A moment later, an older waitress wearing a pink uniform took their orders. After she took the menus away and hollered their selections at the fry cook, Maggie and Reed were left staring at each other. The Officer was wearing his normal ensemble of tan slacks and blue jacket. He wore his sandy blond hair spiked and gelled. He had a definite pattern and practice to how he kept himself. Reed did not dress to impress, but he looked just fine in his modest taste.**

**“You’re a little out of your way today, aren’t you?” Reed asked. He crossed his hands in front of his body on the table.**

**The café was at least two miles from her store. Reed’s detective instincts apparently never slept. “Yeah, I was doing some business for my father on the docks earlier. I saw this place on my way back.”**

**“And you were lucky enough to find me here,” he said with a coy smile.**

**“Very lucky,” she answered. Maggie wanted to ask Reed a million questions about himself, but she didn’t know if she should, or where to start. She decided to begin with the only thing she knew they had in common. “So, any developments in your investigation?”**

**Reed tensed momentarily. “Um, no. We’re still working on it, though.”**

**“I’m sure there’ll be a breakthrough soon,” she said. “How did you get into this kind of work?”**

**Chuckling to himself, Reed took a sip of his water before answering. “Every little boy wants to be a policeman, I guess. It just never went away for me.”**

**“Did you start in New Orleans?”**

**He shook his head. “Nah, I’m not a native, though I love it here. I began in the FBI out of college. It took me a few years to find my way down here.”**

**Maggie envisioned the life of an FBI agent to be much more glamorous and exciting than a common detective in the Big Easy, which meant looking into a lot of domestic issues, drug deals gone wrong, and burglaries. The job change seemed like a step down to her.**

**“Wow, the FBI must have been exciting,” she said.**

**“It was a great job. I loved it there.”**

**She waited for elaboration, but he didn’t offer any. It was going to be hard to form the bond with him that she wanted if he didn’t have any better social skills than she did. “What brought you down here?”**

**“Oh, I just needed a change in scenery at the time. NOPD needed officers,” he said.**

**“Do you ever think about going back?” she asked.**

**Reed thought for a moment, his eyebrows drawing together in a knot. “Not much. This has become my home and I’m comfortable here. I’d definitely miss it if I left.”**

**“That’s good to know,” she said.**

**The Detective looked surprised. “Really?”**

**Maggie fought off a wave of embarrassment that wanted to rush blood to her cheeks. “Sure. It’s nice to know we have good police officers minding our streets. I’d feel less safe if you left,” she said. For all the complications it caused in her life, she actually meant it. At the moment, it felt like Reed was protecting her from her family.**

**“Thanks. It’s nice to hear when a citizen has faith in the force.”**

**Their food came and the waitress stayed at their table for an inordinate amount of time talking to Reed about the weather. Their casual interaction made it clear that this was a café he frequented, and the staff there liked him. They probably felt extra-secure too, knowing that Reed was on their side.**

**Maggie and Reed's after meal conversation turned to the weather as well, and other light topics that meant nothing in the scheme of life. Before he could get up, she declared that she needed to go back to the store to do inventory. She left him with a quiet goodbye and didn't look back as she walked out of the hole-in-the-wall eatery. From a safe distance away once outside, behind another big oak, she watched him get in his car and head back to the station.**