

Little House on the Gulf

Reed's Realm

Reed turned into a short driveway beyond a sign reading RJ IMPORTS, and cautiously pulled up to the guard station and closed gate that led into the property. The guard opened the building door, inspecting Reed's sedan as he walked over to Reed's window. Reed rolled down his window, holding his other hand near his gun.

"Can I help you, Sir?" the large guard, dressed in a dark blue uniform, asked.

"As a matter of fact, you can help me by opening the gate," Reed responded.

The guard slipped both his thumbs inside of the black utility belt at his waist that held a radio, a night stick, pepper spray, and what looked to be a Glock Nine hand gun much like the long dead Peter Kerigan's.

***Glocks must be standard issue around here,* Reed thought to himself.**

The guard smiled and even let out a small chuckle at Reed's request. "You know that is the funniest thing I've heard so far today," the guard said, holding his smiling.

Reed took off his sunglasses and peered up to the man. "You can rest assured of two things. One, I am not joking, and two, with or without your help, I am seeing Ronald Jeremiah," Reed said.

The smile quickly left the guard's face, replaced by a mixture of anger and alarm. "Do you have an appointment to see Mr. Jeremiah?" the guard asked.

"He's not expecting me, but I do have an open invitation," Reed said as he reached inside his coat to get his badge.

The guard took a step back and moved for his gun. Reed had much faster reflexes, and before the guard could release his weapon, the faux policeman was looking down the jet black barrel of Reed's Beretta.

"You sure you want to do that?" Reed asked in a steady voice.

The guard stood still with his fingertips still touching the butt of his gun. Reed could see his face and neck begin to flush red under the sudden stress.

“Hell, big man, after the morning I’ve had, I almost want you to pull that pistle,” Reed stated.

The guard’s eyes tensed and his hand twitched a bit closer to his gun.

Reed pulled back the hammer of his weapon and moved his aim right between the guard’s eyes. “Go ahead, big man, make my day,” Reed responded.

“That’s enough,” a voice Reed recognized over the guard’s two way radio said. “You may put your gun away, Detective Hackman.”

The guard’s expression changed as he listened to Jeremiah’s voice coming from the receiver clipped to his shoulder.

“Mr. Bennett, would you please open the gate and let our officer friend pass.”

“Yes Sir,” the guard said, leaning his head to the side and pressing the send button with the fingers that had moment ago been near his gun. He stepped back over to the guard shack, leaned in, and flipped the switch that started opening the gate.

Reed could see that the guard’s clinched teeth and taught facial muscles, and knew that the man was near bursting with anger and humiliation. Reed holstered his gun and replaced his sun glasses.

“Thanks, Mr. Bennett,” Reed said with a smile. “And sorry about the Dirty Harry bit, but you know, I’ve always wanted to say that!”

If looks could kill, Reed’s last breath would have been taken to say those words. The guard stared daggers at him as Reed slowly pulled past the gate and down the long driveway to the front of the building beyond, where three of Jeremiah’s goons were waiting for him. He wasted no time parking the car and getting out.

The three guys were typical of those with whom Jeremiah surrounded himself. They had thick necks and wide shoulders, and likely not enough brains to know they were always within a moment of death. Two of the three wore jeans and t-shirts, making them almost indistinguishable from anybody who might be walking the busy streets of New Orleans. The other had a green Izod shirt and khaki pants and looked like he might be ready to depart on a golf trip with his boss.

“Follow me,” the Izod man said as he turned and walked into the front of the building. The other two thugs followed on each side of Reed.

Once inside the building, the group walked over to an elevator. The leader pulled a card out of his wallet and slid it into a bar code reader. The elevator doors opened and they all four stepped into the car. Reed noticed an acrid smell that reminded him of blood filled vomit. The doors closed and the man pushed the only button on the elevator panel.

No words were spoken while the elevator traveled up the short building. After a few moments, it stopped and the doors slid open, creaking with wear. There were two more guards waiting for them in the small lobby beyond. They were both armed with AK-47 assault rifles, flaunting them blatantly. The Izod shirt led the group out of the elevator and stopped at the desk before turning to Reed.

“I need all your weapons before you can go in,” he said in a high pitched voice that didn’t match his Adonis exterior.

As Reed reached into his jacket for his gun, the AK-47 guards raised their rifles and took aim at Reed.

“Easy boys. I wouldn’t want any of you to get hurt,” Reed said, not showing the sudden fear wrenching his gut. Reed pulled out his gun slowly by the butt and sat it on the table. He then reached around and pulled a secondary gun from behind his back before finally bending over and pulling a small gun out of a holster around his ankle.

Izod looked down at the pile of weapons with a shocked stare.

Reed just smiled and said, “Hey, what can I say. You never know when you’re going to meet a couple of crazy people with AK-47s.”

No one other than Reed looked amused.

His face drawn into an annoyed glare, Izod shirt again took the lead, motioning Reed to follow him. “Right this way,” he said, going towards a set of double doors, then opening them and stepping inside.

The room was huge and all the walls beyond the lobby were glass from the ceiling to the floor. Looking out over the river to one side and the heart of the city on the other, he realized that he was now on the very top floor of the building. Though the elevator only had one button, the warehouse was taller than he had imagined.

Standing behind a large desk with his back to Reed was Ronald Jeremiah. He was looking out the window as if he were a king sitting on his high throne, surveying his kingdom.

“Come in, Detective,” Jeremiah said, not immediately turning around.

As Reed walked over to the front of the desk, Jeremiah finally rotated to face him. For an extremely successful businessman, Jeremiah looked rather weasley. His dark hair was slicked back with grease that might have come from a fry trap, and his suit, though likely expensive, looked like it might have been cool in the days of disco. Jeremiah's dark eyes were close together, and his nose sloped like a sky jump. Reed didn't like to judge people by their appearance, but this guy made his skin crawl on sight.

"What a pleasant surprise to see you. To what do I owe the honor?"

"I have some questions I would like to ask you," Reed said.

"Mmm, well, I will see if I have any answers for you," Jeremiah responded as he sat down in the high-backed leather chair behind the desk. "Please, Detective, have a seat."

Reed stepped around the chair in front of the desk, sat down, and asked his first question. "I would like for you to tell me everything you know about Royce Adams."

Jeremiah's eyes rolled and he shook his head. "You are here about Royce?" Jeremiah asked.

"Well, he's been a frequent visitor to our station and jail, but I know by the bail posts that I'm not telling you anything that you don't already know," Reed stated. "I'm just curious how it is that a street drug dealing punk gets bailed out of trouble by someone as prominent as Ronald Jeremiah. It just doesn't make a lot of sense to me."

Jeremiah's brow drew with his severe frown. "You have no fucking idea about anything that I do, nor do you really have the right to come in and question me about my family," Jeremiah responded.

"Your family," Reed said, unable to keep surprise out of his tone.

"As if it is any of your business, but yes Royce is my nephew. He is the only child of my sister," Jeremiah explained.

Reed knew that this was not going to go well when Jeremiah found out that his nephew was dead, and the thought of telling him was not very high on his list of all time things to have to do. He didn't figure Jeremiah would be stupid enough to kill the messenger, but Reed suddenly wished he had his guns.

“Your nephew? Why would a nephew of yours be running drugs on the street?” Reed asked. Reed knew that Jeremiah was crooked as hell and that more than likely Royce was working for his uncle.

“It is the circle of shit if you ask me,” Jeremiah said.

“Come again?” Reed asked.

“Royce has had a life of shit, and his family has been nothing short of more shit. I hate saying that about my sister, but she is the biggest fuck up of the family. She married a career asshole and criminal. We tried to talk her out of it, but you know how women are when they have losers putting all the wrong things into a woman’s mind and into their loose as hell bodies for that matter. As a result, she turned her back on her family and also got pregnant with Royce,” Jeremiah said as he turned his chair to the side.

“She was eight months pregnant when her piece of shit husband, who should have been the poster boy of birth control, was sent to prison for armed robbery and assault with a deadly weapon. After about two weeks in prison he obviously pissed off the wrong people in a hurry and was shanked in the shower and left to bleed out above the bath drain. My sister, God rest her soul, had already started to abuse drugs after Royce was born, and she overdosed shortly after he was taken away from her by the state. He grew up in group homes and in juvie hall. But that is neither here nor there. I have tried to look after him as best as I can over the years. So I ask you, Detective, what has Royce gotten himself into now,” he asked.

Reed took a breath, knowing this was the calm moment before the storm. “I’m very sorry to inform you that your nephew was found murdered this morning,” Reed said. “His body was discovered in a back alley dumpster in the French Quarter.”

Jeremiah stared at Reed thoughtfully. “What kind of game are you trying to play here, Detective?” he asked.

“I’m not playing any games,” Reed responded.

Jeremiah sat for another moment and then looked over to the men who brought Reed into his office. “Mr. Tims, please get my nephew on the phone,” Jeremiah ordered.

He then looked back at Reed, “And when he picks up, you are going to have a very bad day, Mr. Hackman!”

As the thug stepped over to Jeremiah’s desk and picked up the phone, Reed reached down and grabbed his cell phone.

“Here, I can save you some time,” Reed said as he opened his phone and pulled up the picture that he had taken of Royce lying in the dumpster with his neck ripped open. Reed took the phone and turned it around to face Jeremiah sitting it on his desk in front of businessman and scooting it forward.

Jeremiah looked down and slowly picked up the phone, moving it closer for a better look. His face was emotionless as he stared at the image on the phone. He then slowly closed the phone and placed it back onto the desk, pushing it toward Reed.

“I’m very sorry, Mr. Jeremiah,” Reed said.

Jeremiah didn’t respond to Reed at all. He instead spoke to his men. “Mr. Tims, would you please escort Mr. Hackman to his car and off the grounds.”

“Wait a minute, I’m here to help and get answers,” Reed said.

“I don’t need your help and I have all the answers that I need,” Jeremiah said, standing up from his chair.

“You can’t go off and—,” Reed started to say.

“Don’t tell me what the fuck I can and can’t do. You dumb ass cops don’t mean shit to me. Now get the fuck out of my office before you have to be carried out,” Jeremiah yelled.

The double doors flew open and both guards rushed in toward Reed.

Reed raised his hands, “Okay, I’m outta here.”

Reed turned and walked out of the room, followed by the herd of guards. The guards closed the double doors behind Reed and stood in front of them as Reed stopped at the desk and picked up all his guns. One of the men pushed a button and the elevator doors opened again and Reed silently went to his car. He could still see the thugs standing outside the building in his rearview mirror as he headed back towards the front gate.

Reed turned left out of the gate and proceeded slowly down the street. After about five blocks, he then looped one block over and made his way back to a business building that was across the street from RJ IMPORTS. He pulled in and parked his car so that he could see the entrance to RJ’s. He knew that Jeremiah was not just going to sit on the information he’d just been given. Jeremiah knew a lot more than he was ever going to say and he intended to find out just what Jeremiah’s next move was going to be.

He only had to sit and wait for ten minutes before a black limo and a large SUV pulled through the front gates of RJ IMPORTS. Reed started his car and carefully crept out of the adjacent parking lot, covertly folding into the regular traffic in order not to be seen. Moderate traffic allowed him to keep a safe distance, but was light enough so that he was also able to keep track of his targets. They made their way out of New Orleans prime in a quick, but controlled fashion.

The further they moved away from the city, the thinner the traffic became. Reed started to feel a bit nervous as various possible scenarios played inside his head. Did they know he was following them and were they leading him out into no where? Was this trip something that didn't have a thing to do with Jeremiah's nephew at all?

Reed didn't think he'd been seen, but he couldn't be sure. The possible negative outcomes plagued him and he knew if he let them, they'd consume him. With effort, Reed didn't give in to his fears. Like he'd been doing for years, he kept his composure, did his job, and continued to follow his suspects.

With his thoughts still swirling, the two cars turned onto a side road that led into an older neighborhood on the far outskirts of the city. They drove down a few blocks and finally stopped in front of a small frame house. Reed pulled his car down another street, jumped out, and swiftly moved toward the house in front of which the cars had stopped. He kept close to the intervening houses and sprinted through the open spaces.

Reed looked around the corner of the closest neighbor house in time to see Jeremiah and four of his men get out of the cars and walk up the sidewalk to the house. Reed could not tell if there were more of Jeremiah's men still in the cars. He didn't want to be seen, but at this point, it was a chance he had to take.

Once all the men were in the house, Reed sprinted to the side and molded his body against the painted wood slats. Ducking under the windows as he moved along the wall, Reed stopped when he reached the chain link fence affixed at the back of the small structure. As he put his hands on the top and vaulted his body over, he could hear yelling coming from inside. The angry voices let him know that there were not a lot of good times happening in the house. As he crept around the back windows, Reed peeked in, but couldn't see anything without exposing himself.

Going passed the backdoor and up the other side, he came to another window at his eye level. The window had no screen and no curtains, providing a clear view inside. The voices inside became louder. Six men were in the modest living room, standing between a television on a pick-up-stick table and a flower print couch. Jeremiah and his four goons

surrounded a man Reed didn't recognize. The new entrant into the play wore a sleeveless white t-shirt. Though he was probably larger and more muscular than Reed, but he cowered in the recliner with Jeremiah and his companions towering over him.

"Please, Boss, you have to believe me," the man in the chair said, his hands white knuckled against the arms. "All we did was talk to him, I swear. We tried to put some fear into him and he actually listened. I swear to you, he was still alive when we left. We didn't as much as put one finger on him."

"Where's Franco?" Jeremiah asked.

"I don't know. He left an hour ago and said he'd be back later tonight."

"Well, I guess my hands are tied and I am only left with one thing to do here," Jeremiah said, turning his back to the man.

The man in the chair relaxed and took a deep breath. "Damn, Boss, you really scared me for a second," he said.

"You had every right to be scared," Jeremiah said.

The slick businessman nodded his head to his henchmen, his lip curled in a sneer. He then swiveled back to the man in the chair, drawing his gun as he turned. A single shot rang throughout the small house, and outside of it, before the man in the chair realized what was happening. The bullet struck the man in the head, just over his right brow, sending his body weight back so hard that his chair fell backwards.

Reed held his body in check, resisting the urge to go into the house guns blazing. He knew what needed to be done, but he was out numbered five to one. With those odds, he wasn't about to make a bet and put his life on the line like that. So he instead held his position and continued to listen.

"Look I want you two to stay here and wait for Franco to show up, and when he does, I want you to take care of him too. Then take the bodies and feed some gators," Jeremiah ordered.

Putting his gun back in his jacket, Jeremiah turned and walked out of the house without a second look. Two of his goons followed him while the other two stayed behind to wait for the arriving Franco.

As Jeremiah's limo drove off out of sight, Reed returned to his car as quickly as possible. He needed to maneuver it to a position that was better suited for a stake out. He parked the sedan between two other cars that lined the street about three houses down from the target house. It was important for

him to be far enough away from the house to not be seen, but at the same time close enough to close in fast if needed.

It was a quiet neighborhood and almost too quiet for Reed's purposes. He almost jumped out of his skin when his cell phone rang. He pulled it off his belt like an unwanted bug and flipped it open.

"Hackman," he said in a low voice.

"Hey Boss, what's going on?" Martin asked on the other end.

"I'm staking out a house on the outside of town," he responded.

"What took you all the way out there?" Martin asked.

"Well, it's a long story, but the short version is that Jeremiah led me here," Reed answered.

"You'll have to let me in on it sometime," Martin said. "Look, seeing that you're busy, I'll make this fast. Mom just called and she said that you were invited to bring a date on Sunday to lunch. I know that's not your thing, but I'm actually going to have a date, so I thought that maybe you could find someone that would let you drag them over."

Reed paused for a moment as a car turned down the road, but it drove passed the house.

"Wait a minute, Martin," Reed said with surprise. "Let me get this right. You have a date? You?"

"Aw, screw you man," Martin said.

"Hey, is that anyway to speak to your boss," Reed asked.

Martin was quick on his feet too. "Ah man, you're right! Please let me rephrase that," he said. "How about, ah screw you, Sir," Martin said with a giggle. "It that better?"

"Yes, that is a lot better, *Patrolman*," Reed returned.

"Hey, now that's not funny," Martin said still laughing a bit. "Look, I know you have a lot of things you have to do other than listen to me. I just wanted to let you know that you can bring someone and that I had already lined someone up with me."

Reed reclined his seat just a touch. "Yeah, well, I appreciate the heads up," Reed said. "I'll see what I can do."

At that moment, a white Town Car pulled onto the street and then into the driveway of the target house. Reed didn't know who was in the car and rushing over might blow his cover. He also knew that he had little choice in the matter because if this was Franco and he didn't try to stop the goons from killing him, he would be back at the beginning with no leads.

"Hey Martin, I got to go, brother." Reed said as he unfastened his seatbelt.

"Give me a call when whatever you're doing is over. I don't like that you are flying solo," Martin requested.

"Okay, I'll get with you later," Reed said as he closed the phone and exited the car.

A man wearing a tan suit got out of the Town Car and moved toward the house. Reed hastily crossed the street and walked up the sidewalk, thinking to himself that this was a hell of a time to not be wearing a vest. Reed was about a house and a half away when the man stopped a few feet from the front door. Reed slowed down too to see what was going on, finally deciding to duck behind some scrubs of the house right next door. When he settled into a hiding spot, he saw one of Jeremiah's henchmen exiting the house.

"What are you doing here?" the man that Reed was almost certain was Franco asked.

"Easy, Franco. Jeremiah just sent us here to talk to you. Why are you so tense?" the man on the porch asked.

"Because this isn't normal," Franco said. "And I'm not making another move until I see Benny. If you are here to just talk, then Benny should be okay."

The man on the steps of the house paused for a moment, glancing back over his shoulder. "You're acting crazy, Franco, but hey, if you want to see Benny, then I will get Benny," he said as he turned back toward the front door of the house.

Reed knew that he was bluffing, and instinctively reached inside his coat to pull out his gun. Sure enough, the man on the porch only took a few steps before he turned with his gun pulled and started shooting at Franco. One of the shots hit Franco in the leg, dropping him to the ground like a sack of potatoes.

Franco moaned in pain as the man walked down the steps. Reed knew he had no choice and no cover for what he was about to do, but he knew it had to be done. The policeman stood up and walked out into plain sight before

dropping to one knee and taking aim at Jeremiah's gunman. The henchman saw Reed out of the corner of his eye, and as he turned to take aim, Reed opened fire, hitting the man four times in the chest and dropping him to the ground right in front of Franco.

Still in shock, Franco leaned down and reached for his own gun.

"Freeze, Franco!" Reed yelled as he stood up and moved toward the suspect. "I'm NOPD. I don't want to hurt you. I want to help you."

With no real chance to draw his gun, Franco slowly pulled his hand out of his coat.

"You can't help me," Franco answered.

Reed's response was interrupted by glass breaking from a window in the house. He looked over just in time to see Jeremiah's other man taking aim at him with an automatic weapon. A black barrel emerged from a window, pointing in his direction. As rapid shots rang out bullets into the night air, Reed ran and jumped back to the cover of the house next door, rolling quickly against the wall of the house. The bullets made quick work of the shrubs that had been his cover just a few moments ago, sending wood and leaves flying out into the air and down to the ground. Reed could see that Franco was dragging himself back to his car.

As Franco opened his car door, the gun fire turned to him and away from Reed. The officer knew that Franco would not stand a chance against the automatic weapon, so he once more dove back into action as bullets littered the side of the white car. Reed ran in between the two houses and shot into the window. The gunman ducked for cover for a moment as Reed jumped up on the porch next to the front door of the house.

The sound of Franco's engine trying to start filled the silence in between gunshots. Some of the bullets had found their way into the engine block and taken their toll. Metal grinded against metal like a motorcycle under the wheels of a freight train. As bullets smashed into the windshield of the car, it finally roared to life. Reed burst through the screen door and rolled into the room, his gun drawn as he looked for the thug in the area of the window.

The gunman swiveled around and directed his gunfire toward Reed. He felt one bullet graze his neck, sending a sharp pain from the front to the back. Reed ignored the pain and opened fire again, striking the gunman in the head with his first shot. The gunman fell forward, busting out the rest of the already broken window before coming to a dead rest with the front half of his body leaning outside of the house.

Reed jumped to his feet and ran back out the front door to see the white Town Car with Franco inside disappearing. By the time Reed could even make it to his car, Franco would be a mile away in one of four different directions.

Not to mention that Reed could feel the blood running down his chest. He reached up and placed a hand on his neck. He could feel the damage left to his neck from the passing bullet. He pulled back his hand and looked at it to see that it was covered in his own blood.

“Well, shit,” Reed said as he walked over to the porch, holstered his gun, and sat down on the porch step, awaiting the arrival of the cars whose sirens were blasting in his direction.