

# Getting To The Bottom

## Reed's Realm

**Reed arrived at the New Orleans Coroners Office anxious to learn what Dr. Fox found that warranted him to come in person to see with his own eyes. Reed made his way inside the red brick building and walked up to the front reception desk. The receptionist who sat behind the desk was a forty-something year old woman with dark hair and eyes. That darkness did not extend to her face, or her warm smile, the kind of smile that put people at ease. That particular attribute was more than likely one of the reasons that she was selected for this particular job.**

**General members of the public found no joy coming to walk Death Hall, as it had become known over the years. A large tan door loomed at the end of the hall, through which was a small room. Inside the room was only a small table in the corner that held a box of tissues and a bible.**

**The wall straight ahead of the entrance to the room had a great window that stretched across the length of the back wall. On the other side of the window was the viewing space. This was where the coroner would bring a body out on a gurney and pull back the white sheet for positive body identification by whoever was the unlucky soul called to Death Hall for that purpose. All those involved in the grim but necessary process of dealing with the dead knew that they would experience the lowest of the lows, day in and day out, but someone had to do it.**

**“Can I help you, sir?” the receptionist at the desk asked with a smile.**

**“Yes. I’m Detective Hackman. I’m here to see Dr. Fox.”**

**“I will let her know that you’re here,” she said, picking up her desk phone receiver.**

**“Thank you,” Reed said as he walked a few steps over to the wall to look at the plaques of recognition that were on display. One of the commemorations was something that Reed didn’t like seeing, but for which he had the utmost respect and honor. It was an ever growing plaque dedicated to all the law enforcement officers killed in the line of duty. Reed stood motionless and looked at the rows of names in silence.**

**“It really makes you stop and think, doesn’t it?” a woman’s voice asked from behind.**

**“Yes, it does,” Reed responded without turning around.**

**“I think some of the people that work here get desensitized by passing it everyday, but I don’t,” the woman said as she moved forward to stand next to Reed.**

**“I never forget. I also check for added names, and pray for their families,” she added.**

**“I guess that is just about all anyone can do,” Reed said as he finally looked away from the plaque and turned to the woman to whom he had been speaking.**

**“It is nice to meet you, Detective Hackman. I’m Dana Fox,” she said as she moved her right hand out to greet him.**

**“Oh, Dr. Fox, it’s nice to meet you too,” Reed returned as he shook the doctor’s hand.**

**“I’m guessing that you are wondering why I called you here in person. Follow me and I’ll show you why.”**

**With that, Dr. Fox walked to the left side of the lobby to a white door that had a key card pad. She took off her ID badge and slid it through the decoder. There was a short buzzing sound, and then a click of the door unlocking.**

**“Right this way, Detective,” she said as she opened the door and walked into the hallway on the other side.**

**Reed followed her. He’d been to the coroner’s many times, and seen a lot of dead bodies, but had never seen Dr. Fox before. She was someone that Reed knew he would have remembered seeing. She was younger than Reed imagined after talking to her on the phone. Even though she was wearing a white lab coat, he could tell that she had a slim, athletic build. She had dark hair with fair colored skin that showed what had to be a mixed American ancestry. To add to her businesslike air, she had a very serious walk with great posture. She carried a confidence about the way she talked and carried herself. Her words about the fallen officers betrayed a very warm heart as well. Reed also made note that she was religious to some degree not only by her comment about praying for those added names on the dedicated plaque in the lobby, but also by the gold necklace that held a cross that could be seen hanging around her neck just above her white silk blouse peeking out from underneath her lab coat.**

**Reed wanted to pass his evaluation of her off as nothing more than the instinctive intuition of a detective that had been on the job for too many**

**years. As much as he might want to allow a wandering mind, deep down Reed knew that there was much more to it. After his marriage had gone to hell, Reed let his work soak up all of his life. He wanted to lose himself in his work and he did a good job at it. Even though he had more on his "To Do" list than he could ever accomplish, he always focused unwaveringly on the task at hand. However, more and more Reed felt like there was something missing in his life. He knew deep down that the void was really someone, rather than something. He didn't try to deny those feelings. He just never allowed himself to add finding the next Ms. Right to his "To Do" list.**

**Reed was not ashamed of his thoughtful evaluation of Dr. Fox. Nonetheless, he would only allow his evaluation to compromise his professionalism. After all, it didn't take a seasoned detective to notice that Dr. Dana Fox was a very attractive woman.**

**"Excuse me for asking doctor, but I don't recall seeing you here before," Reed said as they moved down the hall.**

**"That's because I'm pretty new," Dana said. "Well, new here, not new to the job. I used to work for the Miami Police Department coroner's office."**

**"Oh yeah? What brought you to the Big Easy?" Reed asked.**

**"I've always loved the town and always thought about living here. When the opportunity came up about five months ago, it was one that I couldn't pass up," she answered.**

**"Well, what do you think so far?" Reed asked.**

**The doctor stopped at a door on the right after walking three-fourths of the way down the hall. She turned and looked at Reed before opening it. "So far, I love it. I am hoping that my work will slow down a little so I can get out and enjoy the city more, though. The problem is that you guys on the streets are bringing me too much work," she said with a smile on her face. "Maybe you could have something done about that, Detective?"**

**"I will be sure to pass that on to all the boys downtown. We'll see what we can do to help you out with that," Reed returned with a smile of his own.**

**Dr. Fox then slid her card once more through a reader and opened the door.**

**"It's in here," she said walking through an outer office.**

**Reed could see that they were heading into an examining room. Surrounded by instrument tables and lights, a body lay zipped up in a black bag. Reed guessed that within its confines was the late Peter Kerigan.**

**They both reverently walked into the room. Dr. Fox stepped over to one of the tables and pulled out two pairs of latex gloves from a plain cardboard box. She returned to the body and handed one pair of the gloves to Reed.**

**“Nothing like getting your hands dirty, I don’t guess,” Reed said with a surprised look on his face, wondering what was in store for him.**

**“It’s really more of a precaution,” Dr. Fox replied. “Trust me when I say that I have already dug my fingers through this man enough for both of us.”**

**Reed looked down at the zipped up black bag. He never took his eyes off it as he slipped on each of the latex gloves. Even though Reed had seen his share of dead bodies, such a task would never be the highlight of his day.**

**Everyone, in one way or another, is fearful of the day when it will be their turn to be zipped up in the black bag. Reed, despite living his life on the edge as a policeman, was no different, and seeing bodies always reminded him that he was never more than a moment or two from death.**

**“Is everything okay, Detective?” Dr. Fox asked.**

**“Yeah, I’m fine,” Reed said as he looked up and gave a slight smile and nod to the doctor. He pulled on his second glove the rest of the way, letting the latex pop back against his skin.**

**“Let’s get started then,” Dr. Fox said as she reached for the zipper at the top of the bag.**

**She took a firm grip and slowly started to pull the zipper down. The bag split down the center, gradually revealing the contents. Before he could see inside, the nature of the prize inside became very apparent to Reed’s nose. The smell of Kerigan’s body in the early stages of decomposer was unlike any smell he had ever experienced. The scent almost instantaneously turned his stomach inside out.**

**The smell finally reached its apex when Dr. Fox finished unzipping the upper part of the bag and spread it open to expose the top portion of Kerigan’s torso. The smell exploded into the air like a stink bomb set off in a small closet. Reed closed his mouth and began breathing only out of his nose. He knew that this would only increase the smell, but he couldn’t deal with the sensation of tasting the horrid odor.**

**“Geez, the smell of him!” Reed said. “Is that normal?”**

**Dr. Fox looked over at Reed and answered, “Well, I would not call it typical, however, I have smelled a lot worse.”**

**Reed just shook his head as he tried not to breathe.**

**The second thing that Reed noticed as odd was the color of Kerigan's body. It was a deep, dead blue. Some areas were already turning a dark, almost gangrene color with a dark greenish black hue.**

**"So, what do you notice, Detective?" Dr. Fox offered.**

**"Other than the obvious smell, the color of his body," Reed answered. "Why have parts of his body turned dark green and black so soon?"**

**"Well, the overall color of his body is a deeper blue because of lack of oxygen to the system. As you can see, the areas of his hands and fingers are the darkest. The same thing is true if you look at his lower legs, feet, and toes." Pointing down at the body, Dr. Fox continued. "The reason the extremities are darkest is because these are the parts of the body that are longest distance from his heart. So you can see that those areas were severely depleted of oxygen at the time of death. As you well known, our circulatory system's function is to supply our bodies with the oxygen needed to keep our living tissues alive."**

**"So what you're saying is that when Kerigan died, he stopped getting oxygen. Isn't that to be expected?" Reed asked.**

**"Well, the simple answer is yes, but this is not a simple case. In this instance, parts of the body started to become not only severely depleted of oxygen, but blood volume as well." Dr. Fox continued as she walked over to the counter and picked up a file folder. "When you look at the severe tearing of the tissue around the neck, you would expect the body to loose large amounts of blood." The doctor added. "However, when you look at the pictures from the crime scene what do you see regarding the amount of blood?"**

**Dr. Fox opened the file folder. The pictures of the crime scene were on the very top of the file. She filed through the first few pictures and then pulled out an up close view of Kerigan's upper body. She then handed the picture to Reed.**

**Reed looked at the picture closely. He realized that when he investigated the crime scene, he didn't think about the amount of blood that was around Kerigan when he looked at his undisturbed body. There had been blood, but she was right. With the size and pure devastation of the neck injury, more blood on and around his body would have been expected.**

**"It seems that when you take into account his injuries, that there would have been more blood. But isn't there already a fair amount around him? I**

**don't think he was killed elsewhere," Reed said, handing the picture back to the doctor.**

**Dr. Fox sat the picture and the file on the bottom half of Kerigan's unzipped body bag. "Do you know what the normal blood volume of a typical human is, Detective Hackman?" asked the doctor as she focused her dark eyes on him.**

**"Maybe a gallon or less?" Reed answered with a sense of uncertainty in his voice.**

**"Actually a body holds on average six quarts, which is a gallon and a half," the doctor explained. "I would estimate by the look at the pool of blood around the body and by my exam of Peter Kerigan's clothes, that he lost approximately one liter. Now that would roughly mean that he should have at least five to almost six liters of blood volume left in his body since he is a fairly big man."**

**"I am a little rusty on my volume conversions, but that sounds about right to me," Reed said.**

**Dr. Fox nodded. "So taking Peter Kerigan's weight into consideration, he should have at least a good four liters left in his body. However, during my exam, I discovered that Peter Kerigan only had just under one liter left in his body. That means there is a minimum of three liters of blood volume that is—" the doctor paused and looked up at Reed. She then took her left hand and brushed some her fallen hair back behind her ear, looked down at Kerigan's body, and then back at Reed before adding "—well, it is unaccounted for."**

**"There must be some mistake, Doctor," Reed said. "Is there anyway you can double check the test results?"**

**"I have doubled and tripled checked it," Dr. Fox explained. "Unless he has a bulk reserve of blood stored somewhere unknown to human physiology, then all my calculations are correct."**

**"Another thing that I discovered that only adds to the mystery is that I found high traces of Bromelain enzyme all around the neck wound and in his remaining blood volume." Dr. Fox pulled Kerigan's toxiological report from inside Kerigan's file and handed it to Reed.**

**Reed looked at the sheet. "I'm sorry, Doctor, I'm not familiar with Bromelian. What is it, exactly?" Reed asked.**

**"Bromelain is a quite effective blood thinner and anti-inflammatory that works by breaking down fibrin, which is the blood-clotting protein that can**

**impede good circulation and as a result prevents tissues from draining properly. Bromelain also blocks the production of compounds that can cause swelling and pain,” Dr. Fox explained.**

**“In short, this particular enzyme even being present in his remaining blood and tissue is a mystery to me. What makes it really not add up is the effect of its presence should actually have made Peter Kerigan’s blood flow more easily out of his body due to the lack of blood clotting and thinning agents that make up Bromelian. All of his blood should have been on the ground with the rest. He couldn’t have been moved after the neck injury was inflicted,” Dr. Fox concluded.**

**“Where does this Bromelian come from?” asked Reed.**

**“Most commonly in its natural form, it is derived from the stem of pineapples,” Dr. Fox said. “However, taking into consideration the high concentration that I found, it is not at all plausible to think that it derived from eating pineapples. As a matter of fact, he would have had to been on a solid diet of nothing but pineapple stems for many days, if not weeks, to have these kind of high traces show up in the report, and I find that to be very unlikely.”**

**Reed shifted his view from Dr. Fox and fixed his eyes down on Peter Kerigan. “What in the hell happened to you, Peter?” Reed asked.**

**“That is the true million dollar question, isn’t it?” Dr. Fox asked.**

**Dr. Fox picked up all the pictures and documents that she had shared with Reed and placed them neatly back into Peter Kerigan’s file. She then placed it back on the counter.**

**Reed walked over to the end of the counter and stood by the trash can. While still trying to digest all of Dr. Fox’s findings, he slowly removed the latex gloves, first right and then left, before stepping on the floor pedal to open the trash can lid and toss the gloves in.**

**He turned his attention back to Dr. Fox, who was re-zipping the body bag. “Dr. Fox, I take it that you have never seen or heard of a case like this one?” Reed asked.**

**“I certainly haven’t. Trust me when I say this is definitely something that even a seasoned medical examiner would never forget,” Dr. Fox replied.**

**“That, however, doesn’t completely rule out that there could be another case on file that might be similar to this one, right?” Reed asked again.**

**“I suppose not. I would be more than happy to check our database; however, I have my doubts that I will find anything. But who knows, maybe we’ll get lucky,” Dr. Fox said with a smile. “I can tell you what we really need, but don’t have access to, that would yield the best results,” Dr. Fox said with a very doubtful tone to her voice.**

**“What’s that, Doctor?” Reed asked.**

**“The FBI Forensic Database would yield your best search by far since it is a national database updated by FBI field offices all around the United States. The problem with that is the red tape that you would have to go through to gain access. That might be a waste of your time unless you know someone within the FBI.” Dr. Fox finished cleaning up and made her way over to the trash can to toss away her gloves as Reed had done a few moments ago.**

**Reed stood motionless wondering why it was the good doctor who thought of the FBI Database first. He knew that this was definitely his next step, and he also knew exactly who to call.**

**“Foster,” Reed said in almost a whisper.**

**“I’m sorry Detective, did you say something?” Dr. Fox asked as she turned from the trash can.**

**“Special Agent Joe Foster,” Reed repeated.**

**“You do know someone in the FBI,” Dr. Fox said with a smug tone.**

**With a smile on his face Reed nodded in agreement. “I sure do.**

**“Doctor, thank you very much. You have been a great help to me and my investigation,” Reed said as he extended his hand to her.**

**“You are quite welcome, Detective,” Dr. Fox returned while extending her own hand to Reed’s. “If there is anything else that I find, or if I can be of any other assistance, please don’t hesitate to give me a call.”**

**“I appreciate that,” Reed said. “I’m sure I will be in touch.”**

**With that Dr. Fox showed Reed back to the lobby.**

**As Reed made his way to his car, a slight smile again came to his face, accompanied by a feel of accomplishment. For the first time since he found himself standing in the parking garage overlooking Peter Kerigan’s body, Reed finally felt that he might be on the right track. Even though this new information still only raised more unexplained questions, at the very least Reed was finding more and more pieces. He also now had some sense of**

**direction for his next move. Slowly but surely, Reed felt he was inching closer and closer to solving this mysterious puzzle.**