

# Proper Motivation

## Reed's Realm

**“Damn it all to hell and back, Son, but I think you out did yourself tonight,” the Orleans County Sheriff said while chewing on a heap of chaw and amongst the flashing lights of seven cop cars. “Yep, out did yourself plenty. I know this is old hat to you boys back in the city, but back here folks ain’t as crazy unless you boys run’em out this way,” he added before walking past Reed into the house and the dead body inside.**

**Reed tried to hold his tongue and hold still at the same time as an EMT worked on his neck. His seat in the door of an ambulance was not the most comfortable place to be, regardless of whether an old, country Sheriff was pissed off and complaining. The night hadn’t turned out as expected, he’d been shot in the neck, and the last thing he needed was more aggravation.**

**“Well, I don’t think he’ll be elected cheerful cop of the year anytime soon,” the EMT said in a low voice.**

**Reed chuckled, knowing the statement was funny, but he felt anything but jovial.**

**“This might sting a little,” the EMT said as he started to clean the wound on Reed’s neck. Reed keep as still as the alcohol based solution infiltrated his tissue, and gauze brushed across his exposed flesh.**

**“Well, how’s it look?” Reed asked, his eyes squinted in pain.**

**The EMT placed a large square of gauze onto the wound to seal it, making Reed’s body jump a little as lightening bolts of pain shot from his neck down his arm.**

**“I have certainly seen worse, but I think you’ll live,” he responded.**

**Reed closed his eyes and held them shut tight as the medic slowly peeled the partially blood soaked gauze off and replaced it with a thicker one. The man then wrapped a strip of gauze around Reed’s neck to hold the bandage in place.**

**“I’m glad I won’t be on your short list of nightmare cases. I’ll bet you’ve seen your share of messed up and dead people like I have,” Reed said, distracting himself.**

**“Yeah that’s for sure and you know if that bullet would have been a fraction more in towards your neck I’d—” the EMT stopped in mid-sentence.**

**Reed waited a moment for him to finish, but the man only kept working on the bandage.**

**“You’d be what?” Reed asked.**

**The medic placed some tape on the end of the gauze to hold it in place before leaning back and looking Reed directly in the eye. “If it would have been much further to the right and more than a just a graze, I’d be bagging you too, Brother. Then I’d be dreaming about another good cop down,” he stated.**

**Reed sat motionless and said nothing. The EMT quietly moved around him, picking up the packaging he’d just opened and trashing it.**

**“Okay, that’s got you fixed up,” the medic said after a few moments as he picked up his kit. “You should check in with your doctor in a few days, but other than that I think you’re good.”**

**Reed still just sat there, his eyes unfocused as lights continued to flash red, white, and blue around them. It hadn’t hit him until that moment just how close he had come to being on the ground, bleeding out, and knowing that he would never make it to a hospital in time.**

**“Damn,” Reed said in a low voice.**

**The EMT turned back toward Reed. “What’s that?” he asked.**

**“Thanks,” Reed said. “I just wanted to say thanks for helping me.”**

**The medic smiled and nodded before turning and walking to the front of the ambulance.**

**Reed slowly ran his fingers through his hair, shook his head to clear it, and drew in a deep breath of night air while walking to his car.**

**He drove back to the city in a trance, his concentration just enough on the road to keep his car between the lines and under the speed limit. He didn’t know what was so different about what happened tonight. After all, it wasn’t the first time he had been shot at, or even the first time he had been hurt on the job.**

**Death and body bags were his job. It was something that he would never get used to, but he had come to terms with it long ago. Calls came in and before they were over, many times there was a dead body about to be put in a bag. He rarely thought twice about the risks anymore.**

**Reed gripped the steering wheel with his right hand and raised his left to rub the left side of his temple. Tonight was different, and the difference was that for the first time, he could see himself lying on the floor of that small house on the out skirts of town. He could see himself wading in a pool of his own blood, waiting to be photographed. He could imagine the total darkness that would surround him when the body bag was zipped.**

**Realizing that he didn't even know where he was, Reed slowed the car and pulled off on to the shoulder of the road. Cars zipped past him at fifty miles an hour as he got out of his car and walked around to the other side, away from the road. He leaned his upper body against the hood, resting on his elbows. His hands trembled a little as he took in another breath deep breath, trying to calm himself. He tilted his head back, allowing his eyes to peer into the inky sky above.**

**Reed's eyes tracked to the moon and as he gazed upon it, the stars blurred in the tears welling up in his eyes. His thoughts became clearer, and he understood the dark feeling in the pit of his stomach. Reed was tired of work running his entire life. He had immersed himself so deeply into work, trying to run and hide from the hurt inside, that he'd lost himself. No matter what he did to try to run away from the failures in his life, the pain was still there. And right now, knowing he'd almost died, and hardly anyone would have noticed, Reed felt more alone than he ever remembered.**

**Enough tears had gathered in the corner of his eyes to allow a few to roll down his face. He wiped them away with an angry swipe of his hand. He knew he had to let go of the past. His marriage was over, and there was no going back. Like he was looking at the moon and the stars now, he'd once gazed upon them with her in his arms. That would never happen again, and he honestly didn't want it to. What he wanted was to let go of the pain his divorce had left in him, and to replace that emotion with something new.**

**"To hell with it," he said, pounding his palms on the car hood. He pulled himself up and got back into the car. An idea formed in his head, and he had no desire to debate all the reasons it was not a good one. Instead, he put his car into gear and pulled back onto the road.**

**A few short minutes later Reed pulled his car over and once more found himself leaning against the hood. This time he was not looking at the stars and the moon. He was looking at a sign that read, **Drake's Carved Wood.****

**After a moment of trying to collect his thoughts he rose up off his car and walked to the front door. He reached out and pulled the handle, expecting to hear the growing familiar sound of the bell over the door. However, the bell didn't ring and the door didn't open. He looked up and noticed the sign in the window, flipped over to indicate that the store was closed, along with the posted hours.**

**“Figures,” he said, looking at his watch to see that he was just over an hour passed the closing time.**

***I guess it just wasn't meant to be. I guess I was just being stupid,* Reed thought, staring into the store. A moment later, the back office door opened and he saw Maggie walked out, sitting down the behind the lobby desk. She turned to the computer as Reed stood outside watching her. He had enough time to have second, third, and fourth thoughts about what he was doing.**

**Maggie got up and walked over to a file cabinet and began filing a stack of papers. As Reed leaned to the side to keep her in view, he had another sharp pain shoot down his back from the wound on his neck. He cringed and reached up with his hand, placing it over the bandaged wound. As he pulled his hand back, there was a small spot of blood on the palm of his hand.**

**“This is ridiculous,” he said as he turned and went back to his car. He opened the door and was about to get in when he once again stopped himself. He looked down and shook his head before stepping back from the sedan and closing the door. Laughing at himself, he walked back up to the store door, peering in the front window. Maggie was again sitting at the computer at the back desk.**

**Reed reached up and knocked on the front door with some force so that she could hear it.**

**Maggie looked up in the direction of the door and yelled out, “Sorry, we’re closed!” She then turned her attention back to her work.**

**Determined to at least speak with her, Reed knocked loudly on the door again.**

**Maggie looked up again, her darks eyes piercing the door, not looking too happy about being interrupted. This time, though, she got up and came to the front door. Reed quickly re-tucked his shirt, ignoring that it was stained with blood.**

**“I’m sorry. We’re closed. You’ll have to come back tomorrow,” Maggie said as closed in on the door.**

**Reed reached up and waved at Maggie.**

**Maggie leaned forward as she made it to the door, squinted to peer through the window.**

**“Reed?” she asked.**

**“I’m sorry to bother you,” he responded.**

**She opened the door partway and stepped halfway out. Maggie’s eyes drifted to the top of his shirt that was covered in blood. “Oh my God. Are you okay?” she asked as she fully opened the door.**

**Her eyes were wide and Reed was suddenly sorry he hadn’t thought about it a little more and changed his shirt.**

**“What happened?” Maggie asked reaching out to him.**

**Her fingers on his upper arm were welcoming. “Well, I kind of got shot tonight,” he responded.**

**“Are you okay?” she asked again.**

**The concern and caring on her face touched Reed more than he’d expected. “Yeah, I think I’m okay. It looks worse than it is.”**

**They stood there just looking at each other for a moment before Reed spoke up. “Say, um, can I come in for a few minutes?” he asked.**

**Maggie shook her head. “Ah, yeah, I’m sorry. Please come in,” she said as she moved back into the store.**

**Reed walked in her steps, trying to say calm, but he had to admit to himself that his heart was beating out of his chest. His mouth and throat felt dry and he hoped that he would be able to talk without his voice cracking. This was so hard for him, and it had been a long time.**

**Maggie locked the door behind them and then placed her hand on Reed’s shoulder, leading him back towards the rear of the store.**

**“So what happened?” she asked.**

**Reed chuckled a little. “I ended up being in the wrong place at the right time, and before I knew it, I was in the middle of a shoot out. Just a cop thing,” he responded.**

**Maggie took him back to the back office, where another desk and computer was set up. The surface of the desk was pristine, with no paper and clutter to be found. Sparse pictures were on the walls, almost as if someone had put them there only because someone had complained that the walls were blank. They continued through the office to the back door, which opened into a small kitchen.**

**“Well, this is handy,” Reed said.**

**“Yeah these little shops used to be duplexes before being converted. I’m glad that they kept this little kitchen. It’s nice to have when I can’t get away from the store,” she said, smiling. “Please have a seat.”**

**Reed walked over to a half-sized dining table and sat down. Maggie went to the sink and grabbed a few paper towels and wet them, then opened a cabinet and took out two glasses.**

**“Did this accident have something to do with our case?” she asked while placing ice from the freezer in the glasses and then filling each with water.**

**“I don’t know yet, but I am hoping,” Reed said.**

**Maggie moved to the table and handed Reed the glass of water.**

**“Thanks,” he said.**

**Pulling another chair over next to Reed’s, Maggie sat down. She took the wet paper towels and reached up to wipe some of the blood off his neck.**

**“You don’t have to do that,” he said.**

**Maggie looked into Reed’s eyes. “I don’t remember asking permission. Didn’t your mother ever tell you that a woman is going to do what a woman is going to do,” she responded.**

**“I guess so,” Reed said.**

**Maggie cleaned off the front of his neck where blood had run down and had been hastily cleaned by the paramedic. “If this little shootout of yours isn’t related to our case, how can I help you?”**

**Reed turned his head back over and looked into her eyes. “I didn’t come here to talk about the investigation.”**

**“Oh,” Maggie said, as she dropped her hand back to her lap, still holding the blood stained towel.**

**Reed searched for the right words while taking a breath. “Look, Maggie, I get up everyday and live and breath work. I don’t have a personal life really at all. I’ve let work slowly take over my life, thinking if I would let it, that it would erase my past or something,” Reed paused.**

**Maggie said nothing.**

**“But I have found out that no matter how much I work, my past will always be there. I’ve never let go of those painful memories because it was just too hard and I never really had any reason come up that made me want to stop and change.”**

**Reed stopped again and took drink of water, casting his eyes to the floor. “A few hours ago, I came within a few centimeters of dying, and I realized that I really haven’t been living at all,” Reed said looking back at Maggie. “I don’t want to live like that anymore.”**

**“Why are you telling me this?” Maggie asked in a soft voice.**

**“Because things have kind of changed. I found that I did have a reason to try and change after all,” he said.**

**Maggie’s eyes tracked down to her lap. “I have heard that having a near death experience can lead people to make some changes in their lives.”**

**“Well, that is not really true,” he responded. He shifted over in his chair so he was facing her. “The truth of the matter, Maggie, is that I found my reason for wanting to change the first day I walked through your front door. I knew it then, but wouldn’t listen, much less act. After tonight, I knew that I could not just let the time of my life roll on without ever feeling that I’m truly alive.”**

**Maggie stood up and walked over to the sink, placing the paper towel inside. She then placed both hands onto the outer edge of the sink and leaned over, keeping her back to Reed.**

**Reed felt a wave of anxiety start to roll over his entire body, starting in his stomach and radiating in all directions. Reed started explaining as he stood up and pushed the chair back under the table. “Look, Maggie, I’m sorry for coming. I shouldn’t have. I know that it was inappropriate and for that I apologize. If you don’t feel comfortable with me working your case, I completely—”**

**“Stop,” Maggie said, interrupting him.**

**Reed drew in another breath of disappointment, wanting to kick himself. “I’m truly sorry, Ms. Drake. I can show myself out,” Reed said as he turned to leave.**

**“I said stop Reed, please,” Maggie said as she finally turned to him.**

**Reed turned back to Maggie. She walked over to Reed and placed her hand on his shoulder. “It’s okay,” she said. “I have to say that you really tossed me for a loop. I never expected to be having this conversation.”**

**“Look, I’m really sorry,” Reed apologized again.**

**Maggie shook her head. “Would you please stop apologizing?” she asked, her voice stern. “If we are going to try this out then you can’t be going around saying you’re sorry all the time.”**

**“Well,” Reed began and in a split second lost all thoughts of what he was going to say as what she said sunk into his brain.**

**Maggie smiled and could not help, but laugh a little. “I don’t need a near death experience to let me know that I like you too,” she said.**

**Reed was still trying to recover from a shock he hadn’t realized he would feel. He knew he was staring at her like a brain damaged dog, but he couldn’t help it.**

**“So, now what Mr. Detective?” Maggie asked, still smiling at him.**

**Through the midst of all the emotions and excitement that Reed was trying to contain, he remembered why he had come over. “How about I take you out to lunch tomorrow?” he asked.**

**“Wow, you work fast,” Maggie said, laughing again and walking out of the little kitchen to her office desk. She opened a drawer and pulled out her purse, digging inside until she pulled out her Blackberry. She pushed a few buttons and looked back up.**

**“I have a few things that I have to do tomorrow, but I think that I can definitely fit lunch in,” she said.**

**Reed let a wave of relief crash over him, while realizing that he was actually taking Maggie Drake to Martin’s mother’s house for lunch.**

**“That’s great,” Reed responded. “Do you like authentic home cooked Cajun food?”**

**Maggie looked at him with a very sly look on her face. “Wow, you cook too?” she asked.**

**Reed shook his head, “Not that good, but I was invited to a friend’s house and his mother is supposed to be the best.” Reed waited, hoping for a positive reaction to the news that they were going to someone else’s house.**

**“Then I will look forward to it for sure,” she said.**

**“So, you are okay with going? I wasn’t sure since you don’t know my friends,” he said.**

**Maggie just smiled before saying, “A friend of yours is a friend of mine. After all, we have to get to know each other and what better way than to hang out with people that know you. They will usually come out and spill all the good stuff right away.”**

**Reed rubbed his eyes with his left hand and through his own smile said, “I didn’t think of that. What have I got myself into?”**

**Maggie looked at him with sparkling eyes and smiled back, catching him in a visual embrace.**

**“Now, Mr. Detective, if you are expecting me to be able to go then you need to get out of here and let me finish my work. And I don’t even know what I am going to wear,” She added.**

**“That is definitely my cue,” Reed said as he lifted both his hands in a motion of giving up. “I think I’ll get out of here now before I do anymore damage.”**

**They walked through the store without speaking, Maggie leading the way. When they reached the front, Reed stepped forward and opened the door, but stopped before completely walking out. He turned and once more looked at her, their eyes meeting for a long moment.**

**“Thanks Maggie,” he said.**

**“No problem,” she offered with another smile on her face.**

**Reed walked out the door and made it almost to his car when another thought hit him. He turned back to her, laughing.**

**“Lunch is at noon so I thought I would pick you up around eleven if that works,” Reed stated.**

**Maggie nodded her head. “Yeah, that will be fine.”**

**“And where should I come to pick you up?” he asked.**

**“How about here at the shop? I have a few other things to do downtown afterwards,” she said.**

**“Okay, then I will see you here in the morning at eleven,” Reed said**

**“I will look forward to it,” Maggie responded.**

**“See you then,” Reed said as he got in his car.**

**He started the engine and looked back over to Maggie as he put it in drive. She was still standing in the doorway, holding the door open, her shoulder leaning against the door frame. Reed raised his right hand and waved as he pulled away. Maggie extended her hand to return the wave. As Reed turned the corner and began his way home, he shook his head again, but this time with a smile on his face that felt completely right.**