False Pretenses

Written By

Steve Meredith

Steve.Meredith@live.com

EXT. BRIDGE - NIGHT

There is a thin layer of fog on the surface of the river, making the bridge running over the river appear soft in the haze.

A single pair of headlights cut through the darkness as the approaching car turns left when it reaches the end of the bridge. The car then makes an abrupt turn on to a gravel parking lot.

EXT. PARKING LOT - CONTINUOUS

The car's engine is shut off and the driver side door opens. A man of about 28 years of age exits the car, and grabs a messenger bag from the front passenger seat. The man's name is COOPER REED, a reporter for the Hamilton Gazette.

Reed walks down a thin path towards a dock at the water's edge, where a single trawler fishing boat is docked. A light shines from inside the boat.

EXT. FISHING BOAT - CONTINUOUS

Reed knocks on the door. A voice from inside answers.

VOICE: (O.S.)

Who is it?

REED:

Sir, my name is Cooper Reed, and I'm a reporter for the Hamilton Gazette.

Shuffling can be heard from inside before the lock on the door is unlatched, and a man answers the door.

The man inside is middle aged, with his hair greying at the temples. He holds a lit cigarette in one hand, and looks as though he hasn't showered in a few days. His name is JACK DURANT.

DURANT:

What paper did you say you were with?

REED:

The Hamilton Gazette, it's a small paper in south central Pennsylvania. Are you Jack Durant, sir?

DURANT:

Why the fuck do you want to know?

REED:

(taken aback,
apologetically)

Sir, I know it's late and I'm really sorry for intruding, but I'm researching an article, and I need your help.

DURANT:

What did you say your name was again?

REED:

Cooper Reed.

DURANT:

Cooper, with all due respect, get the fuck off of my boat.

Durant goes to shut the door.

REED:

Wait, I have something.

Reed quickly pulls a bottle of the MaCallan 18 year old out of his bag. Durant looks at the bottle, then at Reed.

DURANT:

Is this a bribe?

REED:

A barter. Whiskey for information.

INT. FISHING BOAT - CONTINUOUS

The interior of the boat is small, but a home nonetheless. There is a small desk with a laptop glowing in the corner, as well as another small table for meals, as well as a bed.

Durant takes the bottle and pours himself a glass of the whiskey, neat. He does not offer Reed anything, and instead, takes a drag on his cigarette as he sits down at his dining table, across from Reed.

REED:

Mr. Durant, this will only take a couple of seconds. I'm doing some background research on a murder that occurred in the town of Riverview about a decade ago. A

REED: (CONT'D)

man by the name of David Chambers was said to have murdered his entire family before disappearing, and he hasn't been heard from or seen since.

DURANT:

Why are you poking around about that?

REED:

So you know the case?

DURANT:

'Course I know the case. Everybody along this river valley knows the case. You didn't answer my question.

A beat.

REED:

Quite honestly sir, I'm just trying to follow up with everyone in the area, do some digging, see if I can find anything.

DURANT:

Good ol' fashioned journalism?

REED:

Exactly-

DURANT:

Well I don't buy that for a second. Not at all. Why the hell would you come to my boat, my home, and not only ask to speak to me, but bring a bottle of scotch so expensive, that you probably had to write ten stories just to be able to afford it? And why is a guy who works for a paper I've never heard of asking about a murder case that occurred easily three and a half hours away from his territory, if not more?

A beat.

DURANT: (CONT'D) What's your real name, Cooper?

REED:

Maybe I should ask you the same thing, Sam.

A beat. Durant's eyes widen for a moment, as he realizes that Reed knows his real identity: SAM GEARY, a former reporter for the Riverview Courier.

REED: (CONT'D)

I gotta hand it to you. Finding a man like you, a guy who faked his own death, that's incredibly hard.

A beat.

REED: (CONT'D)

My real name is Cooper Reed, but I write for the Riverview Courier. The same paper for which you wrote six pieces about the Chambers murders, and it would have been seven articles, had you not fallen off the face of the Earth. I gotta hand it to you, you're a hard man to find, Geary.

GEARY:

So let me get this straight. You enter my boat under false pretenses, claiming to write for a podunk little paper that, as far as I can tell, doesn't even exist. You start asking questions about the story that not only got me disgraced, but cost me my job, and you not only expect me to talk to you about that piece, but you expect me to be happy about it. Do I have that correct?

Reed nods. Geary slowly brings a gun out from under the table and places it on the table between them.

GEARY: (CONT'D)

Give me one good reason, why I shouldn't kill you right now, and dump your body in the river? As I'm sure you saw during your drive out here, there really isn't anyone around here for several miles. The bridge you crossed probably gets single digits worth of traffic on a

daily basis. No one would know, nor care.

REED:

Sam, you're going to listen to me because I know that you wrote a factual piece about David Chambers that you were forced to retract. Because of that retraction, his murder trial ended in a hung jury, as did his retrial, ultimately making him a free man.

A beat.

GEARY:

Cooper, I like my life out here. It's simple. I've got internet and direct TV, and most nights, I'm able to catch my dinner, so trips to the store are sparse for me. I'm going to reiterate my question, and if you don't answer me this time, I'm going to count to three. Give me one reason, why I should kill you right now?

REED:

Because a week ago, the Riverview Police Department discovered three bodies, all with injuries and traumas consistent with David Chambers' M.O. The problem is, the cops that worked the original Chambers' case didn't exactly take good notes.

GEARY:

But you know that I did.

REED:

Exactly, but you didn't digitize anything. So you left me little choice but to come down here and try to convince you to show me your handwritten notes.

GEARY:

Cooper, you need to stop right now. For your own safety, shove this story off on someone else, or better yet, round file it. Do

everything you can to make sure it doesn't get published, and if it does, put it on page D-12.

A beat.

REED:

Wait a minute. Now, I know I came in here and lied to you, but you pull a gun on me, and now you want to be some sort of mentor to me?

GEARY:

It's for your own safety-

REED:

Bullshit, I came down here for information, and I'm not leaving until I get something from you-

GEARY:

Cooper, ask yourself something. When you did the necessary background research to track me down, in what name did you find my boat registered?

REED:

Jack Durant.

GEARY:

Mmhmm, and what about my P.O. Box?

REED:

Durant.

GEARY:

Exactly. But you knew, through some left field hunch, that that wasn't my real name, and you dug further, and God only knows how you found it, but you somehow made that connection that Jack Durant and Sam Geary were the same person. I gotta tell you, that alone earns you my respect, but that respect is lost based on the fact that you can't read between the lines here.

REED:

They put you in witness protection.

GEARY:

A sister program of it, yes. And I'm sure you know what else that means.

REED:

A gag order.

GEARY:

Exactly. An NDA.

REED:

So what do I do now? The FBI and whomever else is investigating this is letting a known murderer walk the streets, and God only knows why.

Geary takes the gun off of the table and puts it away. He then goes over to his laptop, unplugs it, and tosses it out the window into the river.

REED: (CONT'D)

What the hell are you doing?

Geary ignores this, and continues to unplug the cables from the wall. He tosses his TV out the window and into the river as well.

GEARY:

Now we play a little confirm or deny.

REED:

What about your laptop?

GEARY:

Too easy for the FBI to tap into it. It's easily replaceable.

A beat.

REED:

Okay, now it's my turn to be skeptical. A minute ago you wanted nothing to do with me, and were in fact ready to kill me to get me off your boat. Why are you helping me now?

GEARY:

Because Cooper, sooner or later, I knew someone like you was going to (MORE)

come knocking. And furthermore, I knew that while I'd be able to scare off the rookies, someone with your experience was going to step on my boat one day, and I'd have to go through this.

REED:

You don't have to go through anything. You still could have shot me, and I'm still not buying it.

GEARY:

Cooper, I don't want you to end up like me.

A beat.

GEARY: (CONT'D)

And you and I both know that this story needs to be told.

REED:

Can I record this?

GEARY:

(shaking his head "no")

Notes only. Nothing that can be bugged. I'd prefer if you chuck your phone into the river.

Reed looks skeptical.

GEARY: (CONT'D)

Work will pay for a new one.

Reed chucks his phone out the window, and it splashes into the water. Reed then takes out his notebook, and clicks open his pen.

REED:

What happened with the seventh piece that you wrote about the Chambers story?

GEARY:

I was getting close. Too close.

REED:

How so?

Geary lights another cigarette.

GEARY:

I had proof that my version of the timeline was correct.

REED:

Your version of the timeline?

GEARY:

Those who read my pieces, and I have no doubt that you have, are lead to believe that David Chambers came home early the night that he murdered his wife and children.

REED:

Of course, you suggested it in the sixth article you wrote on it.

GEARY:

Well, that's what got me in trouble.

REED:

How so?

GEARY:

I come home the night that the story runs. The sixth story, that is. And it ran on page A-1, top of the fold, the whole nine. We even had it as the lead story on the website too. Anyway, I'm walking up my sidewalk when I notice a dark blue Crown Vic outside. The doors open up, and two suits step out.

REED:

FBI?

GEARY:

(nodding)

Mmhmm. Said I was jeopardizing an open investigation with my reporting.

REED:

Did you tell them to go fuck themselves?

GEARY:

In so many words, yes. But that was before they laid out my

options.

REED:

Which were?

GEARY:

I either stop reporting on the story, enter into their new bystander protection program, or I'm arrested and charged with libel.

REED:

That makes no sense whatsoever.

GEARY:

Your telling me. I asked them if they were sure they weren't representing the defendant.

REED:

(confused, pissed)
This is an egregious affront to
your rights under the first
amendment.

GEARY:

Well, for the first six month of this wonderful new life of mine, I decided to follow Chambers, pretty much where ever he went.

REED:

And the Feds didn't catch on?

GEARY:

Nah, I'd learned a thing or two about how to avoid detection at this point.

REED:

What were you able to find?

GEARY:

It's so obvious now, that I chide myself for not picking up on it sooner.

A beat. Geary takes a drag on his cigarette.

GEARY: (CONT'D)

Chambers is a confidential informant.

REED:

(putting it together)

So he gets off-

GEARY:

In order to continue to do the FBI's bidding. Think about it. What does Chambers do for a living?

REED:

He's the President of an import/export business.

GEARY:

And as such, he oversees a company that has billions of imported goods each year. Even illicit goods.

REED:

Drugs?

GEARY:

More than that. Women caught in the sex trafficking trade. Gun running, you name it, his company touches it.

REED:

And then hands the evidence over to the Feds.

GEARY:

Exactly. Little did I know that my story was going to take down the FBI's ace in the hole.

REED:

It still doesn't answer why he settled in Riverview though. The guy was jet-setting around the country most days.

GEARY:

I'm assuming that Riverview was his wife's suggestion. His kids went to Riverview Academy, a very prestigious school, as I'm sure you know.

REED:

Maybe the family was a loose end.
Maybe they wanted him to be free,
(MORE)

REED: (CONT'D)

without restriction.

GEARY:

Look who has the wild theories now.

REED:

Don't act like you haven't thought about it.

GEARY:

I never said I didn't.

REED:

(shutting his notebook)
Alright, I have to go, I gotta talk
to my editor about this.

Reed gets up and extends his hand to Geary.

REED: (CONT'D)

Thank you for doing this. This story is going to explode off of the page when it's written.

Geary shakes Reeds hand before Reed exits onto the dock.

EXT. BOAT DOCK - CONTINUOUS

Reed exits the boat and slings his bag over his shoulder. Geary exits after him, gun in hand.

GEARY:

Cooper stop.

Reed turns around and sees the gun. His shoulders sag, and the bag falls off of his shoulder.

REED:

You know, I really can't figure you out, Sam.

GEARY:

Cooper, use your head. I am under a federal gag order. Do you know how many times I've been through this? The intrepid Bob Woodward wannabe comes knocking on my door looking for answers. I've got an entire filing cabinet of reporter's notebooks, all filled with the same notes. Did you really think that I was going to let you leave with yours?

REED:

(stunned at his
realization)

You killed all of them. Jesus Christ, Sam. What about their lives?! What about the truth!-

GEARY:

Oh spare me your ideological rant you moron! You throw out the word truth as if I don't care about it. Well, you know what? The truth is what got me into this mess. wife and kids mourn my death because they were fed a line of bullshit the day I disappeared, so don't come around here acting like you have some sort of higher calling than I did. Acting like you're upholding a journalistic standard that I know nothing about. I lost everything. My life has been reduced to this fucking boat! And because of that, I'm allowed to be more than a little spooked. I'm allowed to protect what little I have left!

REED:

Sam, this is the type of story that brings the highest ranking government officials to their knees. We've got to get it out in the open!-

GEARY:

Wrong, it could have brought those government officials to their knees ten years ago. The history books have already been written, so don't act like you're going to take a shit on anyone's legacy. The only thing you'll be doing is putting my life in danger. The FBI knows that there's only one source on the face of the planet who knows the truth about Chambers. That's me. By publishing that story, you're screwing me over. Give me the notebook.

Reed doesn't move. Geary raises the gun.

GEARY: (CONT'D)

Now, please.

REED:

(tossing the notebook to Geary, disgusted)
You fucking coward.

GEARY:

Maybe I am a coward, but I don't regret having air in my lungs.

REED:

You are so fucking selfish.

GEARY:

Yeah, you know what, I am. I am selfish coward. But so are you. Coming on to my boat, pretending to be someone else just so you can get your fucking story. And what will happen after it runs? A pulitzer for you, maybe? You'd be willing to put my life at risk just so you can add another title to your resume. You're a piece of shit just as much as I am.

REED:

Yeah, well at least I don't accept someone else's version of the truth. At least I don't hide behind it. Enjoy your life, Sam.

Reed turns to leave, walking up the path.

GEARY:

Your pen too, Cooper. I'm not an idiot, and I know it recorded everything. You're just as much of a liar as I am.

Geary lifts the gun.

CUT TO BLACK.

The gunshot rings out.

ROLL CREDITS.

THE END.