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The Duce of Pentacles
by S. A. Gorden
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Suspense

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THE DUCE OF PENTACLES
A Paranormal Thriller
By
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PROLOGUE: The Opening of the Deck

In the darkened room, a *click*_ is heard. A high intensity desk lamp turns on. A figure shrouded in shadows places a new deck of cards on the table. The words_ Rider Tarot Deck _can easily be read on the box. Bone-white hands, disembodied by an oval of light illuminating only the tabletop, break the seal on the deck. The deck is placed so a card can be seen._

A robed figure stands behind a table with a disk inscribed with a pentagram, a sword, a cup, and a green stick. The figure's right hand is raised with what looks like a small white wand of unknown substance. His left hand is pointing to the ground. Over the figure's head, two circles twisted and joined, forming infinity. The card is arrayed with a garden of flowers that overflow its sides.

_After a pause, the deck is turned over. The cards shuffled and cut, shuffled and cut, shuffled and cut. The deck is then placed in the middle of

the table and the top card is removed and placed face up next to the deck._

A man leaning on a green staff, his head bandaged, appears on its face, and behind him stands a row of eight more green staffs in a barricade. The man has a vaguely lost, melancholy look as he gazes off to his right.

A noncommittal, "Humfff" comes from the figure cloaked in darkness. The hands reach up, a *click*_ , and the room plunges to black._

CHAPTER 1: The Nine of Wands

His name was James Makinen. He was cleanly dressed but appeared slovenly. His appearance had declined over the last five years when his marriage started to come apart. James' disintegration accelerated when three years ago he had stopped by his old house to pick up his two kids for the weekend and discovered his wife had left for California with both children. After spending all the money he had left after the divorce in court trying to get his kids back, he gave up. His despair and lack of money accounted for most of his disheveled looks. The rest of his looks came mostly from his genetics.

James had thin, wispy, light caramel-colored hair and slightly tarnished wire-rimmed glasses. His fair skin had a tendency to break out at the least excuse. He had the overweight look of middle age. With his pale skin and pudgy appearance, everyone considered him as sickly. Healthy by current standards was a bronze complexion, broad chest and thin waist, the exact opposite of his looks. No one believed that he had never missed a day of work for sickness in the last ten years. His current health had less to do with care and more to do with depression. After his wife and children left him, he would lay in bed for hours unable to sleep. Six weeks after being served the divorce papers, he had tried to exercise instead of tossing back and forth in bed. After an hour of push-ups, sit-ups and jumping jacks, he had slept. This went on until he discovered T'ai-Chi and the other forms, or katas, of oriental shadow boxing. Now every night he would spend hours practicing the different forms and designing his own. In complete exhaustion, he would crawl into bed and the oblivion of sleep.

When the clock's alarm rang in the morning, he would climb into the first clean clothes he found in his closet, check his face in a mirror to see if he had to go to a barber, eat anything he found in the refrigerator that hadn't turned green yet, and drive to the high school to teach. With everything that had happened in his personal life, you would think that he had become a bad teacher. He had been a great teacher, spending hours before and after school to supplement the course work. Now he just put in his time. However, since he had been great, his marking time was better than most people's best.

Every day Makinen had hall duty during the lunch hour. The school had a large open commons area where the kids would mill about while waiting for their fifth-hour classes to start. He stood on the second floor balcony looking over his right shoulder at a group of girls. Most people thought of teenage girls as pretty and sexy, but although he considered them pretty, he was repulsed. When he was younger, he'd had a large fish tank. The tropical fish would form up in schools. They would swim back and forth through the water ignoring the other fish with their strength of numbers. A fish would dart from the school and nip the fins of a lone fish swimming by itself. As if this was a marking of a victim, the other fish in the school would take a turn harassing the marked fish. It would take days but finally he would find the fish in the tank, floating belly up with a hole eaten halfway through its belly and the school pecking at another fish.

Today James watched a girl leave her clique, make a remark to a friendless girl, and leave her in tears. He knew the others in the clique sensing blood would soon join in the game. In a weariness that soaked through his bones, he eased himself away from the railing to break up the group. He was too late.

The new history teacher, Lori Waithe, moved the girls along. She had

graduated five years earlier from this same school. James remembered her in the vague way he remembered the hundreds of other former students. But now it was different. She wasn't a member of some girlish clique anymore, but an individual, a woman. She had graduated from the school, the clique, to become an individual to be admired and appreciated. He watched her move, studied her profile. His eyes followed the clean smooth lines of her body until he got to the curve of her butt. That had always been his favorite part of the female anatomy. The only thing he could still remember without anger or remorse about his former wife was tracing the curve of her buttock with his fingertips after lovemaking.

From the other end of the commons another person watched. The softening look on James's face made it obvious what he was thinking. The watcher followed his gaze to the group of girls. Anger flared. The watcher lusted for one in the group. Since the watcher lusted, so must the teacher on the balcony. The teacher must be destroyed.

* * * *

*Click*_ . The light turns on. Hands reach for the deck of cards, pick the top card and turn it over._

A crowned man sitting on a throne, holding a sword is on the card. But the card is upside down...

The hands seem to hesitate for a time, then they reach up to turn off the light.

CHAPTER 2: The King of Swords reversed

Jefferson William Shermon considered himself a genius and knew he was a sadist. He decided to become a school superintendent while still in grade school. It had occurred while he was waiting in the principal's office with three of his friends. They had been caught smoking in the bathroom. Although he was afraid, he reveled in the fear being generated by his friends as they were called into the office one at a time. Jefferson loved the fear so much, he became the school informer. Always careful to avoid being caught tattling, he would turn in a student and covertly watch their anguish as they were brought to the office. He became skilled at setting up his friends and enemies.

The more he learned about his chosen profession the more he loved it. The only group that could wield as much power as he could were the teachers, and they were on the defensive. It had started years ago when some bright authors with an axe to grind started to pick and choose educational statistics. Who cares if most of the world envies our education system, you can always make it look bad. Sure we graduate a much higher percentage of students than the rest of the world and still are only a couple of percentage points off the best scores but you can always point out that there are a half a dozen countries that rank higher in those few percentage points. If the ratio of failing students goes down in one area, you can point out that raw numbers of failing students are going up and just neglect to point out the student population increased as well. Besides, there is always a survey done somewhere that points out a problem. By the end of the Reagan administration, the myth of massive numbers of bad teachers and bad teaching had become an accepted fact. The politics of destruction dictated that the people put in charge of education had to be chosen by how much they wanted to destroy the current system. The current mythology had even penetrated the educational system itself. It was an accepted axiom of all education administrators that a bad student is always the teacher's fault, even if the student is a Charlie Manson or a Ted Bundy.

When Jefferson was taking his graduate courses to become an administrator, he discovered a study buried in the literature that showed huge increases in student performance. Out of curiosity, he looked further and found the study had been done over and over again showing the same results. At first, he didn't understand why the studies had been buried. When he finally realized why, he became even more proud of his chosen profession.

The studies showed that the smaller the class size the better the students did, no fancy teaching scheme, no miracle system, just more teachers. Over the last few decades, the money and power in the schools had shifted dramatically to the administration of the system. Smaller class sizes would mean more teachers. More teachers would mean less power to the principals, superintendents, school boards, etc. Better to attack the teachers' unions and try to privatize education than to let the reins of power go. Privatization had never worked and never would, but the breaking apart of the current public education system would mean even more power to those controlling the flow of money, the administrators. By the time Jefferson got his first job as a principal, his pride in the deviousness of his job knew no bounds.

The day was going great. He sat in on a review of the new history teacher with the high school principal. By the end of the review he knew that his principal, Joe Kawalski, would try to pressure her into bed before she got her tenure. That excited him because he would then be able to blackmail her into bed himself. The sex didn't excite him as much as forcing her and seeing Joe's face when he let him find out about it.

Right now he was going through his one-hour preparation for the monthly school board meeting. His school board was in many ways a standard small town board. A retired teacher and one smart mother-he enjoyed thinking of her in that way-were the two troublemakers. The remaining board members were easily controlled. The third member was the twenty-seven-year-old son of the local banker. His father wanted him in state politics and ordered him to run for the school board as a starting point. The fourth board member was a local doctor. He felt he should be on the board as his part of community service but was so busy with his own work he just rubberstamped whatever Jefferson wanted. The fifth member had been on the board so many years that he had grown senile. The sixth member was a mother who had five children. The oldest, a nineteen year old, had just been sentenced to twenty years to life in the state penitentiary. The mother blamed all her troubles on her children's teachers. In order to get Them, the teachers, she convinced her church, a strict fundamentalist denomination, to back her election. The seventh and last was a wife of a local hardware storeowner. She was dumber than the doorknobs her husband sold but she worshiped strong people. She would look at Jefferson with those big doe eyes you hear about but seldom see.

The only way the day could get better was if he had an excuse to fire a teacher. He always thought it was funny how the politicians would, during their campaigns, complain how you couldn't fire a bad teacher because of the union-backed tenure laws. You could always fire a teacher if you had an excuse. You just had to do your job. All teaching contracts had simple procedures that could be followed to fire a teacher for cause. Jefferson was always disgusted by the superintendent or principal who couldn't follow the rules and fire a teacher. He voted ultra-conservative Republican because he wanted to be able to fire a teacher for fun.

Jefferson fantasized for the next few minutes about being able to walk down the hall and into the teachers' workroom and fire a faculty member one month before his retirement benefits started. The smile was erased from his face by the knock on the front door.

"Thelma, I told you no disruptions before the board meeting."

"Sorry, Mr. Shermon, but two sheriff's deputies are here. They want to talk to you about a complaint they received about a teacher."

Thelma missed the smile that erupted on Jefferson's face. By the time the two cops entered the room, all that could be seen on Jefferson's face was a scowl of great concern. Jefferson was barely able to control his glee when he heard the name James Makinen. He knew that after the divorce, James had nearly broken down. If he handled the allegations correctly, he should be able to completely destroy James. He had only completely broken one other person before, and he still relished the look of abject despair on his former girlfriend's face those twenty years ago the night before her suicide. Tonight after the board meeting, he would use the leather straps on his wife. His

wife's face twisted in pain would be the jewel crowning the best day so far in his life.

* * * *

James lived on a three-acre plot he purchased on the corner of his cousin's farm. He had pulled onto the lot a rebuilt fourteen-by-sixty trailer house. The land and trailer had been purchased using a loan his father had given him after his ex-wife had left for California. The payments to his father and the utilities, child support and food bills left him the grand total of seventy-five dollars per month for luxuries such as furniture and clothing. The trailer had been delivered with a complete kitchen and built-in closets. In the living/dining room, he had a used 19-inch TV and VCR on an old coffee table, a frayed recliner and three mismatched wooden chairs. Originally, the trailer had three bedrooms. He had a mattress in the largest bedroom, nothing in the second, and had removed the wall from the third to add its space to the living room. With all that empty space, he was able to do all his katas and T'ai-Chi without bumping into walls or chairs. The only other piece of furniture in the whole house was a barstool for the counter in the kitchen. He ate his meals at the kitchen counter sitting on that ratty old barstool.

James had been working on his T'ai-Chi for an hour and was just about to change to a kata when the knocking on the front door interrupted him.

* * * *

The light switches on. The shadowed figure reaches to the deck and turns over a card.

On the card face, a young man caught in mid-stride is holding a sword aloft.

The hands lightly tapped the table in curiosity before turning off the light. Steps are heard followed by the creaking of a door hinge.

CHAPTER 3: The Page of Swords

Al Gallea squirmed in the seat. His first time out on an investigation! This was why he left the police force in Minneapolis to join a county sheriff's department. If he had stayed in Minneapolis, it would have been about five more years before he would have gone out on an investigation.

Although he took notes, he could not remember any of the details of their conversation with Jefferson William Shermom, other than the man's name. He was that excited. He did get the impression that the superintendent thought that the suspect, James Makinen, had at least fondled the girl if not actually having had intercourse with her. Al's hands tapped nervously on his notebook as he thought about their upcoming interview with Makinen.

Deputy Sheriff Henry Hakanen, Al's training officer, interrupted his thoughts. "Well, Al, I know James Makinen. I want you to just listen. I know you are _hot to trot_ this being your first investigation and all, but James won't be handled like you learned in training school. Just try to remember everything you see and hear, and don't muck anything up by talking."

Gallea's anger flared. He'd always thought of the overweight Hakanen as a joke. He never had understood why the other officers always stopped and listened to Henry when he talked. He said to himself, "Fuck it. This is a simple case. I'm going to handle it and no God damn overweight, over-the-hill fart like Henry is going to stop me."

Before Gallea could form a retort in his mind, Henry pulled the car off the road and in front of an old trailer. Somehow, the overweight Henry was out the door, up the wooden steps and knocking on the trailer door before the increasingly flustered Gallea untangled himself from the seat belt and the files he had on his lap.

The door was opened by a middle-aged man in a ragged, sweat-stained workout suit. He whipped his face with a towel and said, "Hi, Henry. Haven't seen you for a while. Come in and sit. I'll make coffee."

"Thank you, Jim. I would like that. How have you been?"

Gallea nearly didn't make it through the door before it closed.

Jim's "fine, thank you" barely made it out of his mouth when Henry interrupted him with, "This is Al Gallea. He's new. He's riding with me tonight."

"Come in. Sit there." James pointed to two mismatched chairs leaning against the walls of the trailer. James went behind a counter and started to make coffee. The TV set blasted a late night news show from its location between their seats and the kitchen. Al started to get up but Henry touched his shoulder and shook his head.

Soon the smell of fresh coffee drifted in from the kitchen. James came out and handed each a chipped coffee cup on a saucer. He left and came back with his own. He leaned against the wall a few feet away. Sipping the scalding hot coffee he said, "Okay, Henry. What's up? You've never stopped by my place before on your own."

Henry had poured some coffee from his cup and into the saucer. He slurped a sip of the now bearable hot coffee from the rim of the saucer before he answered, "Well, Jim, we got a complaint. I've got to ask you some questions."

"You know better."

"It's my job."

To Gallea's amazement, nothing else was said. The men just sipped their coffee. Henry refilled his saucer from the cup he now had resting on the floor by his chair. Gallea's impatience grew, as the two men seem to only contemplate the slowly cooling coffee they were drinking.

Gallea interrupted the drinking. "We would like to know where you were and what you were doing at 4:30 on Tuesday?" Nobody said anything. "You can answer these questions here or at the station."

Henry said, "Sorry, Jim, but this is his first time on an investigation."

"It's all right, Henry. We all have our crosses to bear." Makinen and Henry then got up and went to the door. James opened the door and they both stared at Gallea until he got up and left.

After the door closed, Al yelled, "What the hell was that all about? Aren't we going to do anything?"

"I told you not to say anything. Now we won't get anything out of him."

"What are you talking about? You didn't even try."

"Sorry, son. I guess I should've explained. James Makinen is an old school Finlander. You're new here, so you don't know what that means. Finns don't give a damn about the government's authority and people from the government, even if they are very active in politics. They're not intimidated. A Finn was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, thumbing his nose at the King of England. Through the years, they have played the Swedes and Germans against the Russians, the Russians against the Swedes, and the world against them all. They didn't stop with using governments against other governments. As individuals, they would take on a government. All through the Cold War and the McCarthy Era, the center of the U.S. Communist party was a few miles from here in a small Finnish farming community. Nothing J. Edgar Hoover, Senator McCarthy, or any other anticommunist group tried even slowed them down. They just quietly voted communist while sending some of their sons to Korea and Vietnam. I remember my father's story about one of Hoover's G-men's surprise when a Korean Vet with more decorations on his shirt than there was room for walked up to him after a Party meeting and tried to talk him into coming inside the Co-op for the next meeting.

"I've seen Makinen's father go up to the Governor of the State and lecture him like he was a little boy misbehaving at a picnic. And the Governor took it! After James' divorce, he has even less respect for the police and the courts. His father is a Democrat, but I think that James has been lately doing some work for the Civil Libertarians. After you put those questions to him officially, he probably won't give us the time of day. Now we will have to do it the hard way, by finding people who might have seen him or the girl when she says it happened."

"But can't we just bring him to the station?"

"Son, weren't you listening? We bring him in, he will have a lawyer. The lawyer won't let him say anything to begin with. But Jim is old-time stubborn Finn. He won't give us the satisfaction of answering our questions, even if it clears him!

"There's an old Finn that lives a couple of miles up the road from here. Ano is his name. Nobody ever found out what happened, but he had an argument with his wife twenty years ago. They didn't talk to each other for fifteen years. She still cooked the meals. He still drove her to town. They still slept together. For those fifteen years, they never, ever spoke to each other, just their kids. He cried like a baby when she died five years ago, but he buried her in a cemetery two counties away and bought a plot for himself just down the road from here.

"You challenged Jim directly when you asked him those questions as a cop."

Confused Gallea left with Henry. The next day he figured Hakanen had to be pulling his leg. He asked Nancy in dispatch if she had ever heard of anyone not speaking to his wife for twenty years or so. When she replied, "Oh, you mean Ano?" he felt he had suddenly been dropped into a foreign land. Al decided to call Chris, his best friend since his move north from the Twin Cities, maybe he could help him figure out what was going on. But maybe he wouldn't be of any help. After all, his first indication that things were different up here was when he had first met Chris.

Every year the county sheriff, Jacob McKinsie, would hold a law enforcement picnic. The official reason for the picnic was for all the police departments in the area to get together socially. The idea being that since all the different departments worked as a group many times each year, the better you knew each other the easier it is to work together. The unofficial reason was a kick off for the fall political season for the local politicians. Food was supplied by McKinsie's brother, Junior.

Jr.'s Bar-B-Q-to-Go was Al's first sight of a homemade grill and smoker on wheels. Jr.'s source of mobility was a one-ton Chevy pickup polished so bright you could barely look at it. Behind the truck was a large trailer built on the axles of a wrecked car. The trailer looked like a cross between a small boiler, a cement mixer, and a steel conveyer belt. The color of the trailer was the nondescript red-brown of steel that had all its paint worn off but not yet rusted through. Two small pipes vented the smoke from the grill right above the cooker's head. The smoke blew downwind across the park engulfing half the picnickers in a gray mist. Al would alternately get the smells of grilling chicken and ribs with burnt grease and diesel fumes.

Al never understood how the food from that homebuilt monster could be so tasty. After his first bite, he stuffed himself till he became drowsy. The polka bands woke him up after the huge meal. There is nothing worse musically than a couple polka bands warming up to different tunes. Dusk had come and the mosquitoes had put in their first appearance so Al decided to leave. He was just walking past the fumes from the grills when a voice stopped him. "Would you like a beer?"

Sitting in a lawn chair just at the edge of the smoke fumes was Chris. There was a small cooler next to him and an empty lawn chair.

Al thanked him for the beer and sat in the empty chair. A thick tendril of smoke made him gag. "It takes awhile to get used to the smoke but it does keep the mosquitoes away!" was Chris's comment. They soon discovered that they were both rookies. Chris was new to the town police and Al was new to the sheriff's department.

After a quiet hour of talk, Al got up to leave. "I'll buy you a cup of coffee in town."

"Thanks, but I've got to stay."

"You mean you like polka music?"

"I don't, but my wife does. She's over by the bands now."

When Al finally did talk to Chris about Makinen and Finns in general

that night, he got the cryptic remarks, "I kind'a understand the Red Necks around here. They like Country Music. The punks like Rap. Most kids like Rock. A lot of people like Polka. But I don't understand the Finns. Do you know they like the Tango? Talk to Henry. He's Finn."

Al was completely lost. Maybe he would eventually understand something tomorrow.

* * * *

It was three in the morning when James woke to the phone ringing. The voice on the line claimed to be Kawalski. The voice said he was fired and not to report to the school. James just hung up and went back to sleep. Kids! When would they stop making crank calls.

* * * *

A creaking of a door ... hasty steps ... a *click*_ and then light ... The figure shrouded in darkness quickly turns a card over._

A man with a crown holding a small sceptre in one hand and a cup in the other appears on the card. His throne seems to be floating on water with a fish and ship in the background. The card is upside down.

The figure switches off the light and bolts to the door. The darkened room settles to silence.

CHAPTER 4: The King of Cups reversed

Joseph Kawalski grew up on the family farm on the North Dakota bank of the Red River. His mother died at his birth. His father, Big Joe, tried to raise him, but he never could understand his son. Big Joe, at times, seemed to understand that his son needed more help to grow up but ... He just couldn't quite figure out the whys and wherefores of raising a child. Little Joe didn't take care of himself after weaning! The orphaned calves and pigs were fine after being weaned off the bottle and to solid food. Why couldn't his son handle his own raising?

Joe inherited his father's size and just enough brains from his mother to make it in school. In grade school, he was at least fifty pounds heavier and a foot taller than his classmates were. Unlike the gentle giants everyone hears about, Joe discovered that he could get anything he wanted from his classmates just by towering over them. He stuffed himself on the best lunches of his classmates. Relaxed in the best seats in the back of the room. His first few weeks in college were a shock to him. There were dozens of bigger and, in some cases, meaner students in the school. He floundered until the fall of his junior year in college. He got a freshman girl drunk and date raped her. His power back was back! That quarter his grade point average went from a 1.9 to a 2.8, after he started to use his size to intimidate selected undergrads to do his homework. His favorite technique was to date rape a girl in a class he was taking and rough her up until she helped him with his homework. In his senior year, he refined his scheme. He would get a girl who had a steady boyfriend to go with him to a quiet corner of the student union to study. There he would drug a can of pop he would buy her with an animal tranquilizer he got from his father's farm. He would then time his rape to correspond to when she started to come out from under the tranquilizer so she would remember the sex act. After showing her Polaroids he had taken of her while she was unconscious, she would be willing to do his class work. He never got caught in either his blackmail or his rapes. After each success, his confidence grew. By the time he graduated, he had raped two dozen young girls and had a grade point average of 3.0.

His skill in intimidation grew when he graduated. Somehow he knew he was small time. He always seemed to know whom he could push and whom to avoid. That was until he met Jefferson William Shermon. He became Shermon's sycophant. He now lived on the scraps that Jefferson gave him and he lived well. At eighty thousand dollars per year, he earned more than ninety percent of the local rural population. He loved lording his wealth over the neighbors with a facade of leased cars, boats and ATV's. He also controlled the lives of hundreds of people, either through their finances or their children. It was a

rare month that he didn't collect something for his due.

Joseph sat in his office for a few minutes with a cup of coffee before he had to walk the rounds of the hallways for the mandatory morning appearance. There was a timid knock on the door that he knew had to be Amy, his secretary. She was old, ugly, and fat. She had come with the job. Shermon refused to let him fire her. Besides, she was so old you could get her to sign any document you needed and she would never know what she had signed. It was a perfect way to protect themselves if there ever was an audit of the school's books.

"Mr. Kawalski, John Penington is in the office. He says that Mr. Makinen is here. He wants to know who is he suppose to be substituting for?"

"Makinen here?" Anger burned in Kawalski. _The little prick showed up, did he? Well, he will regret it!_ "Amy, you tell Mr. Penington that Makinen will be leaving. I'll take care of Makinen."

Kawalski boiled down the hallway to Makinen's room. Staff and students parted before him, recognizing the foul mood. But the curiosity seekers, the ones who stop at an accident hoping to see the blood, were pulled along in his wake.

Bursting through Makinen's door, he growled, "I fired you last night! What are you doing here?"

James, surprised, tried to figure out what Kawalski was talking about. As Kawalski continued to yell at him, James slowly unraveled the events. Instead of anger, James felt a weariness, but something else burned behind a thin boundary in his mind.

In a soft voice, James said, "Joe, Joe, Joe ... I know this is hard for you to understand, but you can't fire me. I have something called a contract. You're just a building principal. My contract is with the school district, just like your contract is. I'll do my job and you do whatever it is you do."

"You God Damn Little Prick! You get out of this school now! I don't give a fuck about your contract! You get your ass out of this building. Now!"

"If that is how you want to play the game, I will leave but with everything I own."

"You're leaving now!"

But James had already turned his back on Kawalski and started to take down the posters decorating the walls. Screaming, Kawalski reached down. Grabbing James' shoulder, he rolled him around pushing him into the wall. Kawalski's fingers gouged into James' shoulders as he glared into Makinen's face. Something happened! Kawalski didn't see fear in those eyes. The eyes had turned flat, emotionless. James' hands came up through the hold that Kawalski had on him. They pushed against the inside of Kawalski's elbows and circled around the arms. Kawalski's grip on James was gone. His thumbs were bent back. His arms twisted and locked fully extended. Pressure was applied straight up, tendons stretched joints creaked and Kawalski went up on his toes unable to move. The pain was excruciating.

James, his emotionless eyes penetrating Kawalski's mind, whispered, "I am going to get all my things. You are going to leave."

James released his hold on Kawalski. Joe collapsed down from his tiptoes, his knees wobbling as the pain subsided. Kawalski stumbled away, rubbing the feeling back into his sore arms. He saw the crowd at the doorway. He hesitated. He wanted to turn around, but he remembered the eyes with no fear and the ease in which his hold was broken. The pain still throbbed though his arms. When he looked up again, the crowd was gone and he lurched through the door.

After Kawalski left, the strength went out of James' legs. On his own wobbly knees, he staggered to his desk. He sat heavily on the old rickety swivel chair with a bad spring and tried to understand what had happened to him. His mind drifted from the amazement of the karate move-that he had only practiced alone-actually working, to the real possibility of losing his job. He sat in dumb bewilderment until he heard over the loud speakers the voice of Joe Kawalski, "James Makinen has been suspended from his duties. If any staff

or students have had problems with Mr. Makinen, please come to the high school office during first or second periods this morning. Mr. Makinen's classes will meet in the library this morning. Bring study materials."

Henry Hakanen and Al Gallea had been sitting in the district office waiting to discuss a schedule for interviews with the staff and students about the sexual-assault complaint with Shermon when they heard the announcement echo in from the hallway. They stared at each other in astonishment and said in unison, "Damn!" Together they got up and walked down the hall to the high school office. There they found a red-faced Kawalski standing in his doorway.

Henry was the first to speak. "Mr. Kawalski, this is a police investigation. We cannot have you talking to any potential witnesses before we interview them. I am going to have to ask you not to talk to anybody about Mr. Makinen and to give me a list of names of all the people you have already spoken to."

Kawalski erupted, "I don't give a damn about your investigation! I fired that little prick last night and he still showed up for work today. He won't leave and I ordered him to." His eruption sputtered to a stop as he finally realized who he was talking to and what he was saying.

Henry and Al glanced at each other, an opportunity! "We'll talk to Mr. Makinen. Just remember, don't speak to anyone about him." Henry took a step closer to Kawalski, making sure he was focused on what he was about to say. "I will be stopping by after I talk to Makinen. I expect to have that list from you made out by then. Okay?" He waited until he got a nod.

Henry and Al left the office. "Do you know which room Makinen is in?"

"Yes. My grandson had him a year ago. I picked my grandson up after school a couple of times from Makinen's room."

"Do you think Kawalski blew our case?"

"We never had one. After this little escapade of his, we've got even less. We still have to go through an investigation, but we'll have nothing when we're finished."

"What do you mean?"

"I know the girl, Makinen, Kawalski and Shermon. The only one who hasn't lied so far is Makinen and he hasn't said anything."

"What do you mean?"

"Jenny Rossetti is a 'good time' girl. She never would have met Makinen after school to get help for her schoolwork. I asked my grandson. He doesn't think she is passing a single class. If she met Makinen after school, it was for something totally different. They still could have had sex, which is statutory rape because she is seventeen, but the whole first part of her story is wrong. Kawalski and Shermon are troublemakers. I don't know how they got the jobs they have but they are real bastards. Watch them carefully and you will see what I mean."

He paused for his next thought. "Makinen is on the edge. This thing with the girl doesn't sound right with him. He has been just hanging on since his wife left with his kids. Be careful with him. If he goes over the edge, he could be very dangerous."

Gallea looked at Hakanen in shock. What in the world was he talking about? They continued down the empty hall in silence. When they came to Makinen's room, they found him with his head bowed, sitting at his desk. Henry motioned Gallea to back away from the doorway. Going back a few steps, he said in a loud voice, "This is Makinen's room." When they got to the doorway again, James was piling books on the desk. As they stepped into the room, Al seemed to catch a glimpse of something feral and lost in James' eyes. It scared him.

Again Henry started the conversation. "Hi, Jim. Talked to Kawalski."

There was a slight break in Makinen's voice, "I know. I'm leaving. I told him I'm taking everything I own with me. You know he can't fire me. Suspend, yes. Fire, no."

"I know, Jim. Could I help?"

James looked up in surprise and in gratitude replied, "Yes."

The two deputies helped take down posters and pile books. Hakanen

asked, while taking down a poster, "Jim, what are you going to do tonight?"

James paused and looked Henry straight in the face. "The same thing I've done every night for the last six months, go home. Unless, of course, it is Wednesday or Saturday, sauna night at Dad's."

It took awhile for Gallea to catch on to what was said. By the time Al caught up with what was happening, Makinen was sitting in front of his computer deleting programs and files. He was telling Henry, "This school district is so cheap, I had to buy most of the programs I use in class." James got up and picked up a stack of books with the computer still working in the background.

Gallea had to ask, "What are you doing now?" nodding at the computer.

Makinen gave him a conspiratorial smile and said, "I'm defragmenting the hard drive." Seeing the confused look on Al's face, he continued. "I deleted the main program files, resident programs, and data I owned on the hard drive, but with a utility you can bring back the files. You see, all that happens when a file is deleted is that the address is erased. The file will stay there until it is written over. Defragmenting a disk rewrites all the information on the disk drive and stores it at the end of the disk. That means all my files will probably be written over and cannot be used again."

By the way James continued smiling, Gallea knew he had done more than what he said, but he had no idea what. He left the room with an armload of books, feeling that he had participated in something. It was the same feeling he'd had when he was in high school and he and his friends went out during Halloween to soap some doorknobs. Later in the day riding back to the station with Henry, he asked, "What really happened with the computer files?"

Henry laughed, "Just what he said. He just didn't tell you that the computer would probably have to have the system reloaded, which is a real pain. You see, a computer program that you buy is really a set of programs. Jim just erased one of those programs. The remaining programs are just sitting in the machine and will probably start running the next time you turn the computer on, but without the whole set of programs, the computer will lock up and quit working. With what Jim did to the computer, the easiest thing for them to do will be to erase everything on the computer disk and reprogram it as if it was new."

"Why did you let him do it?"

"He needed a break, a release. Besides, I owed him one. He did tell us where he was Tuesday night."

* * * *

Kawalski gave the deputies the list of names. He left for home still fuming about the disrespect given him. Nobody had treated him the way the deputies and Makinen had since his first year in college. The rage simmered through the night. He planned his moves for tomorrow and savored the thoughts of what he would force Lori Waithe to do during tomorrow's follow-up review meeting in order to get her tenure. He packed in his briefcase duct tape, sex lubricant, an assortment of drugs, and a Polaroid camera. He had great plans for his meeting after classes with Lori. He knew that there were no meetings scheduled after school hours this Friday and that the janitors would be gone after six o'clock from the wing of the school he planned on bringing her to.

He squirmed uncomfortably in his car seat while driving to school Friday morning. His penis had hardened as he thought about his torturing of the girl. The irritation of the sensitive skin against the fabric of the pant leg and the thoughts of a possible stain caused the squirming.

Kawalski started the morning by visiting every teacher in his or her room. In double talk he'd spent the night rehearsing, he told them he wanted Makinen out and anyone who didn't help him get rid of Makinen would have their lives become a living hell. His years of intimidation and torture had honed his phrasing to an art form. What he didn't realize was that except for the few he was already blackmailing, his intimidation strengthened the resolve to oppose. An impromptu faculty meeting formed of its own accord at noon. A union rep from the State was called and plans were made to force him and Shermon

out.

Kawalski's next stops were to the support staff. Here he met with greater success. All but one of the janitors buckled under his intimidation. When he was finished, he felt he had in place enough slander to easily justify Makinen's dismissal. His power assured, he went next to a personal attack on Makinen. He wanted Makinen to feel pain.

It was noon. Kawalski left the building. He walked down the street toward downtown. Halfway to the business district, he turned down an alley. He worked his way back toward the school building. Only a block and a half from the school behind the Lutheran church next to a dumpster, he found them, Pike Borland and his two strong-arm flunkies, John Whitefeather and Arne Johanson.

Pike was the slick 'pretty boy' who, in some high school classes, becomes the permanent class president. He personally introduced a dozen girls to sex and passed on ten of them to John and Arne before they could pull their panties up after he was done with them. He was never the best athlete but, somehow, always was mentioned first at the pep fests. He always arranged to make the final decision on the prom theme or the homecoming float. He took the credit for everything that worked and accepted none of the blame. If anyone had a problem with that, John and Arne were always there to change their minds.

Every day at lunch, the three boys would meet behind the Lutheran church. Smoke a little pot. Drink a little beer. On occasion, an eighth or ninth grade girl would be with them to be introduced to the joys of drugs and sex. The old Lutheran preacher never knew the hasp holding the padlock on the gardening shed was broken, let alone that under the shelf in back of the shed was a stash of drugs, booze, and a couple of blankets for a quickie.

Kawalski had followed the boys to their hideout a year and a half ago. Instead of busting them, he used them for information and a source of income. They were more than willing to buy their liquor and pills from him ... at a reasonable mark up, of course.

"Pike, got enough of everything?" The nod in return was enough. "How about anything for me?" Again a shake of the head was the response. "You know, it is too bad someone doesn't take care of Makinen. The way he laid his hands on poor Jenny ... and getting away with it! All that will ever happen to him is getting laid off for a day or two.

"Now, boys, you should head back to school soon. You don't want to be late for your next class ... Do you? It would be better not to go back at all if you are late." Kawalski left.

The boys knew that Kawalski was hinting at something when he mentioned not being late for classes. On that cue, the boys went into the shed. They found a case of beer and a bottle of whisky that they hadn't put there. Party time went through their minds. Arne left to get some girls. John went for his car. Within five minutes, the boys and two girls were driving out of town to a fire trail ten miles north of town. By the time John pulled the car off the highway and into the State Forest, one of the girls had a can of beer in her hands and Pike pounding between her legs. The other girl was pushing Arne's hands away from her breasts with one hand while pulling on a can of beer with the other. She would belch out between gulps of beer, "You don't get anything till I'm drunk."

Pike sat by the bonfire John had made, sipping beer. He could hear John and Arne with the girls, back by the car. He liked his life, girls, booze and money. He knew that after high school he would have to clean up his act. He knew that as long as he was careful and only pimped and sold drugs in school he would be safe. He was under age, protected by Kawalski. Besides, no one thought anything bad could be happening in their nice quiet rural school. He wanted the five to ten grand he knew he would make off the students in the area schools before he graduated. He would have Arne set up something for Makinen to satisfy Kawalski. What he needed now was another beer.

Lori Waithe waited as long as she could after the buses left with the students before going to her scheduled meeting with Kawalski. It had been an

open secret that he would try to get her to sleep with him. At the noon meeting, the two women teachers who had been hired since he became principal confessed that he had blackmailed them with tenure to get them to have sex. She had, with the help of the other teachers, developed a plan. She would enter his office with two voice-activated tape recorders. One would be hidden in her handbag and the other would be in her jacket pocket. At least one of the recorders should record Kawalski's blackmail. The faculty would then use the recordings to force the removal of Kawalski and Shermon. To protect her during the meeting, two teachers had volunteered to wait outside his office for her, Bonnie Franklin and Mike Garrison.

Lori knocked on Kawalski's office door. She opened it after hearing a muffled 'come in.'

She started the conversation, "You asked me to come in for a follow up on my evaluation for tenure?"

"Yes, yes. Sit down. I have just a couple of things to finish up." Kawalski pretended to file some paperwork. He took his time. He knew that forcing people to wait was intimidating. It immediately set the rules on who was in charge. His next step was even more intimidating. After putting a file in the cabinet across the room, he walked back to his desk. Instead of sitting in his chair, he sat on the edge of his desk. His huge bulk towered over Lori.

"Now, during our last meeting, I listed some problems I felt you had with discipline and communication. I know there hasn't been time for you to develop any changes in your teaching style yet. What I want to talk to you about today is 'Why should we give you more time to develop your teaching skills?' You have been here a year already. Why should I give you more time to learn how to teach? What makes it worthwhile for the school to continue paying your salary while you learn, and not just hire someone else?" At the same time Kawalski said those words, he shifted his position on the desk. His foot now rubbed the outside of Lori's thigh. He slowly drew his foot back and forth across her thigh.

Lori looked up at Kawalski and crinkled her nose. When she was younger, vanity had kept her from first getting glasses and then wearing them. She had learned to squint to see the chalkboard or a friend's face. Her mother had bought contact lenses for her to try, but her eyes wouldn't adjust to the lenses, so another year passed squinting at the chalkboard. By the time she started wearing her glasses, the squinting was an ingrained habit. With the weight of the eyeglasses now resting on the bridge of her nose, the squint had changed to a crinkling of the nose adjusting the position of her glasses. What no one had ever told her was that the scrunching of her face was more than a little distracting, it was down right erotic. Her lips would pout and open slightly. The wrinkling of her cheeks and focusing of her eyes gave her the same expression of someone lost in passion. The reason the arousal was so intense was that the look would flash across her face and then be gone. It was a little like subliminal suggestion, a flash of sex then nothing. She knew that there was something about her being close to anyone talking that would break their train of thought. She had even overheard an old boyfriend describe her as being distractingly cute when she was near. But she never learned what it was.

Unconscious of what she was doing, she looked up at Kawalski crinkling her nose and saw in his face his confusion as he forgot what he had planned to say. She took the opportunity the hesitation caused to quietly, but firmly, say into say into the recorder, "Please stop touching my leg." She then gently pushed his foot away.

Kawalski, unfamiliar with being refused and confused at having his seduction interrupted, leaned closer to Lori's face and reached down to put his hand on the inside of her thigh. "You need to make it worth my while to let you stay."

"Mr. Shermon won't let you get away with this."

Kawalski laughed, "Shermon? He wants to fuck you too. Let's cut this crap. You want to keep your job-you put out. No fucky, no money. Get it?"

Lori reached between her legs and pulled on his hand. "I get it-but you're not!" she gasped as she pulled at the resisting hand.

Still laughing, Kawalski said, "And just who is going to stop me, sweetie?"

"I am, dearie, and Bonnie and Mike, who are waiting for me just the other side of that door."

"What?" Kawalski removed his hand and stood up. He looked at Lori, still sitting but trying to arrange her clothes. "You're fucking with me. There's no one out there."

"See for yourself?"

Kawalski opened the door. Bonnie and Mike were sitting at his secretary's desk. They looked up when the door opened. Bonnie said, before Kawalski's opened-faced astonishment, "Mike, it looks like I was right. We will have time for a meal before the first showing of the movie."

"Hi, Mr. Kawalski. Don't you just hate being stuck working on a Friday night?"

Lori pushed past Kawalski. "Goodbye, Mr. Kawalski," she spit out as they left.

Kawalski stood in the doorway his fingers turning white as he clenched the doorframe as they left.

* * * *

The door opens. *Click.* The light is on. The hands seem to be slow and deliberate as they turn over the next card.

An angel pouring water between two cups is the figure on the upside down card.

The shrouded figure gazes for a time at the card before reaching for the light.

CHAPTER 5: Temperance reversed

People who have not taken heat baths cannot believe how good they feel. The Native Americans consider it a religious experience. Finlanders reject that idea for very practical reasons. If it is religious act, then you can only take the bath at certain times or with certain ceremonies. Finns want their saunas whenever they can.

James Makinen was sitting in his father's sauna for his regular Saturday night bath. He loved his father's sauna. His father had worked for years to get the size of the room to match the size of the stove. Too large a stove and the heat could get too intense and ruin the tranquility of the bath. Too small and the room could become cold-under 100 degrees-by Finnish standards during the bath. James had only been in the sauna for five minutes barely able to get acclimated for the normal one-hour bath. His father sat next to him. Neither man talked. They let the dry heat soak into their bodies.

Used to the heat, James poured some water on the top bench to cool it and climbed up to the hotter ceiling temperatures. As the heat penetrated his body, he considered what had happened to him that week. By the time he reviewed in his mind the phone call he placed on Friday to the union lawyer, he had relaxed enough to calmly analyze everything she had said. She had told him that over the last three years, seventeen teachers in the state had formal sexual complaints filed against them. Only two had been proven. Out of the remaining fifteen, five teachers had kept their jobs. Those five districts had not made any public announcements and had let the professionals investigate their cases. Six of the others had won their cases and had received back pay but had not been given their jobs back. The remaining four had won every case in court, but instead of paying any money, the districts had kept appealing the awards. She felt that the remaining four teachers would never receive any back pay. The districts had already paid more in lawyers' fees than the court awards.

The more James thought about the conversation, the more he became convinced he would not take it anymore. He heard his father fill the dipper at the faucet near the cement floor. He handed his wash cloth to his dad to wet.

James covered his face with the cold wet cloth. He heard his father throw the water on the rocks covering the stove. He listened to the rocks sizzle, then felt the hot steam roll down off the ceiling. Needles of heat penetrated his body as the steam transferred its heat. Finally, James had to go to the lower bench. Careful to sit where his feet had been resting so his bottom wouldn't be burnt, he let the heat slowly soak through his body, dropping the blood pressure and relaxing the muscles. In the calm of the heat-induced lethargy, he let his mind plan his moves for the coming week.

He heard his father wet some cedar boughs and briefly heat them on the rocks. He took one and gently slapped his body. The heat had relaxed his muscles and dropped his blood pressure to close to dangerous levels. The gentle slaps would tighten the muscles and bring the pressure back up.

James and his father cycled the heat up once more, then doused themselves with cold water and went into the cool dressing room. There they stayed until the steam stopped rising from their bodies. They repeated the process.

The only conversation between the two men occurred when they were cooling in the dressing room. The heat from the sauna seemed to let each know everything they needed to know from the other. The only two unusual items talked about were Jim's request to borrow a 200-pound nail magnet from his father and his father's request that Jim join them on Sunday morning at their church. His father sensed that his son was in trouble.

A 200-pound nail magnet didn't weigh 200 pounds but it was capable of lifting a 200-pound weight. They were used for collecting small metal objects such as roofing nails from the ground after re-shingling a roof. His father wondered what Jim would be using it for.

* * * *

Tom Peterson was a young pastor. He had been minister of the Chapel of God Church for only a year. He still felt the passion and enthusiasm of life in the Bible College when they talked about The Church fighting the things of the world. What he didn't know and what most people attending the politically active Protestant denominations don't know, is that the fight against the 'world' now being waged by the churches is mostly a creation of their own making. Peterson's bible college teachers knew that competition brought the best out of a group. In sports, the competition is easy to define. But bible colleges taught theology, and for theological competition, you needed an opponent. Any education the religious couldn't control has always been a safe target for a church to compete against. The college instructors taught that the public education system was a religion called secular humanism with the school's educators as the religion's priests and the school buildings as its churches.

One of Peterson's first memories of his college days was a group of classmates driving to a public school passing out Christian flyers. In that group was a pretty young girl who would soon become his wife. It was in his second year at college during another evangelistic push that he decided that he would become a pastor of a church. He never knew that his church's fight against humanism, Darwinism, secularism and any other newism was just made up so they could have an opponent to compete against in every town and village in this country.

Tom Peterson, still fresh from the indoctrination of the Bible College, hadn't as yet tempered his thoughts of the schools as churches of secular humanism and of teachers as their priests. When he heard the rumors of a teacher having sexual relations with a high school girl, his anger flared. He pulled his class notes from college. He called the good Christians and asked them to find out who the teacher was. He prayed and prepared for the calling down of hell and damnation.

Tom stood in front of his congregation. He had heard that the name of the teacher was James Makinen just before the service. He recognized the name. When he asked his deacon, Mr. Shermon, about the name, he was told that he was the son of the older couple who always sat in back. He decided to ask them to

come up to the front of the church after the service to pray for their son. The congregation was waiting.

"The text today will be coming from Second Peter PAGEBREAK

CHAPTER two." Tom waited as the people turned to the pages of their bibles. He loved to hear the rustle of the pages. While he waited, he noticed a few new faces in the congregation, a lone man in back, a young woman in front, and a family in the third row.

"I will read verses one, fourteen, and fifteen.

"'But there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

"Having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin; beguiling unstable souls: an heart they have exercised with covetous practices; cursed children:

"Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bo'-sor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness;' Amen!"

"False teachers!" Peterson yelled. "Bringing damnable heresies!"

"Teachers! Heretics! Teaching lies to your children. How we came from monkeys. The false prophecies of humanism..." Peterson stamped and yelled and pranced about the altar. He told of teachers denying the Lord. He told of humanism permitting drugs and sex. He told of one teacher in their own school! He had gotten to the section in his sermon where the adulterous teacher had just beguiled the unstable soul of an innocent student when the young woman in front got up and left. Everyone watched her. The man in back and the Makinen couple left next. The young family followed. Unknown to Peterson was that half of his congregation either were teachers or had sons and daughters or mothers and fathers that were. Before he could start his sermon again, the auditorium had emptied. The only ones left were two deacons and their families and an old man in a walker who had to wait for a ride to pick him up.

In the silence of the nearly empty church, the old man spoke up. "Son, you sure acted dumber than Balaam and not as smart as his ass today. You need to know what you're talking about and who you are talking to before you open your mouth. I guess you now know how many teachers you had in your flock."

* * * *

James Makinen woke in the pre-dawn light. He had slept badly. He kept seeing, in his mind, the soft curve of Lori Waithe's back as she stood in the front pews of the church. He watched over and over again the swaying of her body as she strode out of the church. He had enjoyed watching her before. But after seeing her stride out of the church, it had changed from pleasure to desire. In his dreams, he kept reaching for her body. All he found was the shabby blanket he had on his bed.

Unable to go back to sleep and prevented from going to work, he decided to clear some of the brush from the swampy lowland in back of the trailer. He got an axe, a bow saw and a machete from the small shed he had built in back. He cut, chopped, and dragged brush into piles all day only stopping for a sandwich at noon.

It was late afternoon when he heard the honking and cars. A caravan pulled up along the road. Out of the cars and pickups poured high school boys and some of the wilder girls. A few threw empty beer cans at the trailer. A knot of rowdy kids got tangled on the steep sides of the highway ditch and tumbled into a pile of arms and legs and squeals. A girl at the bottom of the knot took the opportunity to grope her boyfriend's crotch. The resulting squeals occupied three carloads of students and kept them out of the upcoming fight.

Makinen had learned early in his career that you never back down from a confrontation. He walked right up to the screaming kids. In his hand, he had the bow saw. The cars had arrived while he was cutting a small tree down. The saw had seemed to stay in his hands. He rocked the saw back and forth in his

hand as he walked to the kids. When he was only a few feet away from the mob, the swinging brought the saw up against his forearm. It seemed to fit. The steel tube of the bow saw ran along the edge of his forearm in the same classic way you see the police hold their batons on the late night cop shows. The saw blade ran along the outside edge of the arm protecting it.

The first student, an Arne Johanson, was swinging a tire iron. Behind him and to each side were a half a dozen other boys two of which had baseball bats. Arne didn't wait. He and John had beat up other people for Pike. He had learned that the one who strikes first usually has the least bruises afterwards. He swung the iron at Makinen's head. Instead of the crunch of metal against flesh that he expected, he heard the ring of metal against metal. Before he could recover, he felt excruciating pain in the back of his knee followed by the air leaving his chest when he landed with his back on the ground. It took him a full minute to catch his breath and open his eyes. When he did, he saw two of the boys with him with their hands raised, one had blood flowing from a ragged cut on his arm while the other had a foot long gash across his chest. Arne heard screams of terror from the distance and the sound of cars speeding away.

Makinen walked into his sight. Arne saw that the bow saw he held was bent at an angle with blood dripping from the blade. Makinen looked at them and shook his head.

"Stupid. Stupid. Stupid," he said, still shaking his head. "Okay, boys, you grab Arne and start walking. Your friends left you. I'm going to call the sheriff's department now. I want you a half mile down the road by the time they arrive. If you're not, I will have to talk to you again. Understand?"

The two boys shook their heads 'yes' and dragged Arne to his feet. For the first time, Arne realized his leg was broken. He screamed himself unconscious. When he woke again, he was in the hospital.

* * * *

Henry Hakanen was finishing the last of the day's paperwork when Nancy buzzed him and told him he had a call on line two. Al Gallea was leaving the office when Henry waved him to a stop.

"You're coming with me on a call, Al," Henry told him after he hung up the phone. As they were leaving the station, Henry told Nancy, "Send an ambulance up county six. Tell them they will find three injured boys walking down the road. Then send a deputy to the hospital. Tell him to hold the boys there until I get there to arrest them."

Al asked, "What's going on?"

"Some local punks tried to attack Makinen. We'll get Makinen's statement and then talk to the kids."

When Henry and Al pulled up to Makinen's trailer, they saw the dozen black tire marks left by squealing tires along the edge of the road. In the driveway halfway to the trailer, they saw a tire iron and a couple of baseball bats. Makinen was waiting for them, sitting on the trailer's stairs. After they got out of their car, Al noticed that there were drops of blood on the bats.

"Al, would you collect the evidence while I talk to James?" Henry ordered.

Gallea went back to the car and got out a camera to photograph the scene. He walked back toward the trailer until he could overhear the conversation between his partner and Makinen.

"Henry, you've got three in the hospital. If you want the names of the others, get their names from them. I'm tired. Right now, I feel about a hundred."

"Okay, Jim, but why don't you stay with your parents until this thing settles down?"

"What, and have them show up there? I'm staying."

"Jim, I can't have you hurting any more kids..."

"Hold it, Henry. You're the law. You take care of the problem. It's your job, not mine."

"I can't have you hurting anyone else. I can put you in protective custody."

"I'm staying..."

Al had to move past hearing distance to get pictures of the tire tracks on the road. When he started back to the car, Henry was carefully loading the baseball bats into the trunk. Makinen wasn't in sight anymore. Al figured he went into the trailer.

"Henry, what went on here?"

"James was in back, doing some yard work. The kids pulled up more drunk than sober. They were yelling something about getting even for Jenny when they came at him. Three of them had those bats and the tire iron we put in back. The other kids seemed to be along to see the fun. Makinen took their weapons away and everyone got scared and left."

"Henry, there's more to it than that. What else happened?"

"That's all, Al."

That was all Gallea got out of Hakanen about his talk with Makinen until they got back to the station. "I told Jim he should go somewhere until we could get things settled down. I even suggested he go to California to see his kids. All he did was look at me and say, 'I'm not the one you should be worried about.' We've got to work fast, Al!"

The two deputies got out of the station just before midnight. The three juveniles were booked on assault and battery charges. Two had been released into their parents' custody, while Arne spent the night in the hospital so a specialist could view the x-rays of his leg in the morning before his release.

* * * *

James woke, drenched with sweat. When he concentrated, he could just remember the last few images of his nightmare. He was watching Lori walking away. He followed, enjoying the swaying of her body. He reached out to touch her shoulder. When he removed his hands, there was blood on her blouse. He looked at his hand. It was filled with blood. He woke. It was the second time that night that he had the same nightmare. He took a shower and went into the living room, turned the TV to the morning news shows. He slept finally, with no dreams, to the reading of the death tolls from across the world. One hundred killed in fighting in West Africa. Thousands die of diseases in Asia ... earthquake in South America ... bombing in Ireland ... school bus in California...

* * * *

The hands turn over the card.

A man in armor sits on a large black horse. He has in his hands a circular disk inscribed with a star. The armored figure looks as solid and immovable as a stone mountain.

CHAPTER 6: The Knight of Pentacles

Sandra Thomas had great parents. Her father was a lawyer and her mother was a teacher. Her sister was beautiful and smart. Sandra was plain and even smarter. Sandra grew up toughened by the comparisons between her and her beautiful sister. She would come home, crying about a comment by a boy in school or an award her sister got because of her beauty, to the warm arms of her parents. She loved them so she became a lawyer for the teachers' union.

* * * *

Normally, Sandra administered the State legal office for the teachers' union. She would assign or contract out assignments from the requests sent to her office. Today she had a problem. She had contracted out the sexual-assault case of the small rural community to a local law firm. But now she had a request for help from another teacher claiming the use of blackmail for sexual favors by the principal and superintendent of the same school. And unlike most cases having to do with employer misconduct, there was proof, including audio tapes. She had a feeling that both cases were linked. She knew she wasn't the best trial lawyer on staff, but could she trust that both cases would be handled correctly if she left them with the contracted law firm?

She called in her assistant and told him he was in charge of the office until she got back. She phoned the local law firm, telling them she would be taking charge of the case but they would still be on contract for support services. She made appointments with the county sheriff's department for the next day. Finally, she called her parents and asked if they would baby-sit for tonight. She had to go out of town for a few days and would like some time alone with her husband. Her husband never knew how much of that night he owed to the warm loving feelings Sandra got from her parents.

* * * *

Jim carefully placed the 200-pound nail magnet in his shoulder bag. He went through his closet and found his best-looking shirt and pants. From his sock drawer, he found a dark blue tie he had last worn at an uncle's funeral. He brushed and polished his shoes. Putting on a wool sport coat, he looked at himself in a mirror. He took a deep breath and was ready.

This was payday. He knew that Kawalski and Shermon would try to stop his check. He drove into town trying to run through what could happen when he asked for his check. He tried to breathe in through the nose out through the mouth. He centered his energy in his lower stomach, the Ki, the location that oriental martial arts refers to as the center of the body's force. He saw the sign _reserved for office staff_ in the choice parking spot in front of the school and pulled in. He took a final few breaths, controlling his emotions. He entered the building; walked to the high school office.

"Amy, I would like to get my check."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Makinen, but I don't have one for you."

"Well, I want my check. You better find out where it is."

Flustered, Amy hemmed and hawed for a few moments and then walked to Kawalski's door. Knocking, she entered. Jim used the distraction to stand next to the office computer. There he carefully placed the shoulder bag with the magnet next to the machine. He heard the machine beep once and the disk drive start to run and finally silence. He had the bag back on his shoulder before Amy came out of Kawaski's office.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Makinen, but Mr. Kawalski doesn't know anything about your check. He said you could come back tomorrow."

"Well, I'll just talk to him," Jim said pushing past Amy. As he entered the office, he said, "Well, Joe, I want my check."

"Get the hell out of my office!" Kawalski ranted. Jim walked in far enough to lean the bag against Kawalski's computer.

In a soft kindly voice, Jim commented, "Joey, you had better stop being a prick. This isn't the schoolyard. This is where the big boys play. Here you are just a little turd floating in one mighty big cesspool." Kawalski's ravings completely masked the crashing of his computer.

As James left the high school office, he again quietly replied, "I want my check. Don't make me come back." Makinen went next to the superintendent's office and finally to the business office. By the time he left, all five of the administration's computers had crashed. It took another hour before anyone noticed that their computers were no longer working. The discovery of the malfunctioning computers corresponded with a phone call from the school's attorney.

"Mr. Shermon? This is Jack."

"Who?"

"Jack Andrews, the school district's attorney."

"What do you want?" snapped Shermon, his anger still boiling from Makinen.

"I was just contacted by Makinen's attorney. You have to pay him his salary. In fact, you should keep him on salary until he is officially fired."

"What! Do you know what the little fucker did?"

"I don't care what he did. You and the district can be held in violation of his contract. That means you can be held personally liable for his salary plus penalties. In other words, he could take you to the cleaners in the courts. As the school district's attorney, I would have to advise them

to suspend you from duties if Makinen files a complaint. That would be the only way to limit the district's liability. Are you willing to put your job on the line just to keep Makinen from having his pay?"

Andrews had, at various times, defended some of the worst scum in the region. He had learned to appreciate a good string of cuss words. The string of epitaphs that came from Jefferson were only passing in creativity but in venom they rated an _A_. He decided that he would have to contact a couple of the more responsible members of the school board. They might need to cut their losses and get rid of Shermon. With the bribery of a favorable recommendation, you could usually find a district that would hire a troublemaker off your hands. School boards were notoriously easily swayed into hiring anyone who looked good and had what appeared as the proper background.

Shermon fumed in anger for the next few hours. He had just gotten himself under control when he realized that all their bookkeeping, even the carefully doctored books, had been on those computers. They had kept everything shady on the computers to make it easier to erase if anyone started to check up on the bookkeeping. Could they rebuild the fake books without being caught?

* * * *

Makinen never heard the bullets. He woke to the squeal of tires and a sharp pain in his arm. When he touched his arm, he felt a warm liquid, blood. He turned on the bedroom light. Crouching low, he went into the bathroom to clean and check his arm. He found a two inch long crease along his upper arm. Wrapping his arm in a pillowcase, he got his twenty-gage shotgun. Leaving the lights on, he threw on some clothes and hurried out the back of the trailer. He ran to the highway ditch just past the edge of his yard. Crouching in the brush, he waited with his loaded shotgun.

When he looked back at his trailer, he could see the light coming through the bullet holes in the side of the trailer. He realized that he would have been killed if he had a bed and not just a mattress on the floor. The dozen bullet holes were placed in a saw tooth pattern stretching across the bedroom just under the windowsill. When he saw this, he started retching up sour stomach acids.

He'd just finished a dry heave when he heard the sound of tires rolling down the road. A car was coasting down the tar without lights and its motor off. As it rolled past his hiding spot, shots erupted from the back seat hitting the area around the bathroom window. James returned fire, filling the passenger area of the car with three rounds of number six birdshot. The car started up amid screams of pain. As the car pulled away, Jim pumped his last two shells into the rear tire area of the car. In the pre-dawn dark, Makinen saw sparks come from the left rear of the car as it settled onto the tire rim.

It was late afternoon when Henry and Al again showed up at Makinen's. James was trying to cork the holes in his trailer with wooden plugs when they pulled up. Henry started the conversation.

"Those look like bullet holes."

"Do they?"

"Arne and his friend John are in the hospital again. They claim to have been shooting rats with a .22 in the dump behind his father's barn. He claims his brother must have thrown away an old box of birdshot. They hit it with a .22 round and the shells went off. Both boys have a dozen pellets in them. You wouldn't happen to have heard anything about that?"

"No. I haven't talked to anyone all day until you showed up."

"It's kind of funny about those boys. They showed up at the hospital with their car all shot up as well. They claimed they were shooting the rats from their car! Do you believe that?"

"Yep. Those boys aren't too smart, you know. If they keep on trying to shoot rats, they could just wind up dead."

"I told them that too. In fact, I told them if they even touched a gun, I would put them in jail for the next ten years just to protect them from themselves. I even have them in jail right now for reckless endangerment and

the firing of a weapon too close to a residence. I talked to their parents. They are going to be in the jail for a while.

"Jim, I think maybe you should visit your kids out west."

"No can do. Just look at all the maintenance I have to do around here, all of these holes to patch. If I left on a vacation, do you really think this trailer would survive? I borrowed the money for it from my father. I don't have any money now, and he can't afford the cost of losing it now that he's retired."

"I'll be watching everything very closely, Jim. I would bring you in for your own protection if I thought it would help. Besides, I wouldn't want you in the same jail with John and Arne."

"You had better take care of yourself. It looks like you're bleeding," Henry added, pointing to Makinen's arm.

"Thanks, Henry. I will"

In the car ride back to the office, Al asked, "Are we in the old west? Why didn't we arrest him?"

"For what?"

"For shooting those kids. That's what."

"You mean for shooting back at someone trying to kill him. You saw those bullet holes."

"Well, how about for lying to the police."

"Exactly what did he lie to us about?"

"We got to do something."

"Yes, we do. Makinen isn't the one who has been lying. So who else has been?"

"God damn it. You're right! We go after the girl, Shermon and Kawalski."

* * * *

Hands turn over the next card.

A man lies on the ground. His body pierced by ten swords.

The hands hesitated at the gruesome sight. Slowly they reach and turn off the light.

CHAPTER 7: The Ten of Swords

Vera woke every morning an hour before she had to get her kids up for school. That hour was the time she had for herself. She put the coffee on and rolled out the stationary bicycle. She turned on the TV to her favorite morning talk show. She rode the bike to the sound of the local news and the smell of brewing coffee. Twenty minutes later when she got off the bike, she modeled her body in front of the living room mirror. She held her arms over her head as she examined her midriff for any signs of giving birth to three kids. After passing inspection, she went to the kitchen for her coffee.

Vera heard a noise outside the window. She saw the backs of some dogs fighting over something in back by the alley. _"Did the kids leave the cover off the garbage cans again?"_ she thought as she went to the back door.

She yelled at the dogs but they continued fighting. She saw what she thought was a white kitchen garbage bag between the dog's legs. She turned to put the garden hose on the dogs but it wasn't coiled up by the back door. Her eyes followed the green hose back to where the dogs were fighting. Carefully, she pulled the hose away from the animals. Once it was in her hands, she turned the water on. The dogs scattered with a series of yelps.

Vera screamed and fainted. Her children found her there and called 911. To the protests of his older sister, Vera's teenage son took a couple of Polaroids of the girl's body before the cops showed up. He was suspended from school for the rest of the week when his study hall teacher caught him passing one of the pictures around to his friends.

* * * *

Henry spent most of the day trying to find Jenny Rossetti. At one o'clock that afternoon, he received a call from Nancy, the dispatcher, to go to the police station at Deer Lake Falls. Henry knew something had happened

when he saw the BCA, Bureau of Criminal Apprehension, (the state police investigative branch) van parked in back of the station. When Henry entered, he saw Frank.

"Hi, Frank. What are the state cops doing up here?"

"We've got a murder, Henry, a bad one. We're trying to keep things quiet for a while. We need to get as much done as we can before the reporters show up. We'll be in real trouble if we don't have something by the ten o'clock news. If the reporters start a panic, we might never find out what happened."

"What can I do?"

"I need to find out everything you know about Jenny Rossetti."

"Damn. I've been looking for her all day. What happened?"

"I trust you, Henry, so I'll tell you what we have. You know this is all preliminary."

Frank waited till he got Henry's nod in reply, "Around 7:30 this morning she was found dead in a backyard. She was killed at least ten hours earlier and dumped in the yard."

Frank paused and gave Henry an inquiring look, "So, why were you looking for her?"

"She filed a sexual assault complaint against her teacher. I've been checking on it. I thought she was lying. I was going to see if I could find her and find out why."

"Could the teacher have killed her?"

"I don't see how. I have been having a car drive by the teacher's house every hour or so and he was home last night. I talked to him yesterday afternoon and he wasn't even thinking about the girl at that time."

Anxious to find out more, Henry continued, "Come on, Frank. We've worked together before. You know me. What is it about this case? You owe me."

Frank checked quickly for anyone who could be listening. He said, "Okay, Henry. You know the people and the area. You might be able to help me get started. Remember, nothing has been verified in the lab."

He took out his notebook. Referring to his notes, he continued.

"Rossetti's body was found around 7:30 AM by Vera Johnson, wife of one of the Johnsons in the accounting firm of Johnston and Johnson. By the time the local police could secure the crime scene, both she and her children had disturbed the area around the body. The body was found naked and split open from the neck to the crotch with what looked like a chain saw. The lab will be checking on the gouges left on the pubic bone and ribs to see if they can place a manufacturer and model to the saw. The body had also been partially eaten by neighborhood dogs. I checked with the town police and that area of town had been known to have problems with dogs. The paper ran a story last week about a poodle being attack and killed by the other dogs in the neighborhood. The person who killed the girl also washed the body with a garden hose from Johnson's house. During the cursory examination of the body, it was noted the corpse had been bled dry. No significant blood was found in the yard. The degree of blood loss was not consistent with a massive trauma death of a chain saw attack. So here is what we think we know now. Rossetti was murdered by being bled to death some time last evening. Her body was split open with a chain saw either to hide the manner of her death or remove something the killer wanted or needed. The body was then taken to a place where it would be found. Finally it was washed with the garden hose and left for the neighborhood dogs to chew on."

Henry's only reply was a very quiet, "God!"

* * * *

At the law firm of Bodonavich, Finch, and Heiminien, James was escorted to a conference room. Sandra Thomas stood to shake hands with him. They tentatively examined each other. The lawyer trying to judge how well the man would stand up in court, the man trying to decide on whether he could trust the lawyer.

Early in their meeting, Sandra decided that Makinen would be one of the

few clients she had who would more than hold his own in any court procedure. The only thing that bothered her was a small shiver that started behind her neck every time she looked at Makinen.

It took her till the end of the meeting before she could place the feeling he gave her. She had brought her children to the State Zoo. They had spent a long, tiring day covering the different exhibits. She had stopped to clean a candy smear from the corner of her daughter's chin when she felt a cold shiver in the small of her back. She looked around. Seeing no one near, she look at the exhibit they were standing next to. On the other side of the visitor fence, she saw the big cat. The tiger was watching them with a studied indifference. As the big predator watched them, the cat stretched displaying her huge claws. The lethal display and casual indifference that could turn in an instant to death increased her uneasiness. As Sandra hurried her children to the next exhibit, she felt those indifferent eyes track their movements. She again looked again at Makinen. She saw behind the veiled eyes the indifference of a predator who was only held in check by a thin fence of restraint.

Sandra suddenly felt pity for Kawalski and Shermon. No matter what happened in court, they had disturbed the wrong person. She watched the eyes of the predator cloud over at the end of their meeting. A sad smile appeared on Makinen's face. He was now just an average person constrained by society into the role of a normal citizen. Sandra then wondered how many other _ordinary_ people she had met over the years who were something totally different behind their facade of normality. She decided that she never wanted to know. She felt comfortable behind the facade.

* * * *

James sat in his father's sauna. He let the heat soak through his mind and body. The sweat stung as it penetrated his wounds. He used the heat-induced lethargy to channel his mind until the pain became a slight annoyance separated from his thoughts. Something was missing from what was happening to him. He knew about Kawalski, Shermon, Jenny, and the punks that attacked him, but he knew there had to be someone else. He wouldn't put it past either Kawalski or Shermon to get Jenny up to making charges. He knew that if they had, when he had started pushing back, they would have been prepared to come directly after him again. So they had to be opportunists trying to use Jenny's complaint against him.

But who had put Jenny up to lying? She would never have come up with the idea herself. Who else was involved? He let the steam relax him as he let his mind drift over the last week. He felt a thought nudge at his mind. But when he tried to zero in on the thought, he saw in his mind's eye the curve of Lori's back and the sway of her hips as she slowly walked away.

James knew that nothing else would now break past with his memories of Lori. He threw another ladle of water on the rocks and contemplated the swaying of her body in the swirling steam.

Jim left the sauna relaxed. He saw the sheriff's car parked in front of his parents' house. Inside, his mother and father were seated at the kitchen table drinking coffee with Henry. He said, "Sauna's free," and poured his own cup. His parents took a couple of towels and left for the bath.

After sitting down, he commented, "You know there is someone else involved in this thing."

Henry took a sip and replied, "Yes, I know. He just killed Jenny."

"How do you know it's a he?"

"I don't know for sure. But the way she was killed took strength." Henry finished his coffee. "You be careful. Whoever killed Jenny is dangerous."

Henry got up to leave. He looked carefully at James as he drank his scolding hot coffee. Henry was just about to offer James police protection until they could find the killer, then James looked up from his cup and met Henry's stare. The look froze Henry in place until James spoke.

"You be careful too. You're going to have to find him."

Pulling himself together, Henry said, "Thank your parents for the coffee."

"I will."

As Henry left, he wished in the back of his mind that the killer would come after James before he found him. All he would get from the courts was life in prison. From James, he would get retribution. But he was a policeman, he would find him first.

* * * *

The hands turn over the card.

In the light of the solitary lamp, the upside down figure of a cloaked man, head bowed, leaning on a staff with his left hand and holding aloft a lamp in his right, can be seen.

A slight tremor shakes the hands as they leave the card. A chill penetrates the shrouded room.

CHAPTER 8: The Hermit reversed

The killer opened the refrigerator door, reached behind the food piled in front. He caressed the Saran-wrapped bundle before he pulled it out of the fridge. He gently cradled the bundle. His hands stroked the package, all his, forever, came the thought. His mind drifted back in time. He again was prying open the ribs, watching the slow beating of the heart. His left hand felt the slow throbbing of the organ as his right slit open the artery. Again the warm fluid filled the chest cavity, immersing his hands. Once more the final weak flutter tingled his left hand. He rubbed his face against the cold organ feeling the firm muscular tissue through the plastic wrap. He walked over to the refrigerator. He slid the plastic wrapped heart behind the leftover pot roast and closed the door. The killer then went to a shelf filled with pictures. His eyes scanned the array of faces till they stopped on one photograph yellow with age, a picture of a young girl with a smiling face.

The killer had always known he was different. His strict abusive father and shrewish wife had kept his differences in check. He always remembered the joy he experienced at funerals, his mother's at age six, his father's fifteen years ago, and his wife's five years ago. His laughter at his mother's funeral had earned him a beating that night by his father. By the time his father had died, he had learned the skill of pretending grief. The fear of retribution had kept him in check until just a few years ago. Driving along a rural highway, he came upon an accident. The car had skidded off the road and into a large tree. He stopped his car and went to the wreck. Inside was a man gasping for breath, pinned between the crumpled dash and the seat. A trickle of blood dripped from the side of his mouth. His eyes had a panicked, dazed look.

The killer reached into the wreck and touched the clammy face. He started to giggle at the man who attempted to scream for help between gasps of air. The killer heard another car pull to a stop behind him. His hand covered the dying man's face suffocating him. By the time the Good Samaritan got to the car it was over. The killer collapsed next to the wrecked car, his shoulders shaking with stifled guffaws.

The Good Samaritan patted the killer's back. He said, "That's all right. You did what you could. It was just his time. Let me help you back to your car."

He let the Samaritan lead him to his car. There he sat until the silent laughter stopped. The sadness on his face was genuine when he answered the questions of the local deputy sheriff about the wreck. He was truly sad the death had happened so quickly.

Jenny was the first time he had done the whole killing himself. He had chosen her because she reminded him of the first girl he had ever fucked, years ago. He had bribed Jenny to come with him with free beer and a fifty-dollar bill, then he drugged her beer with a barbiturate. After she had gotten sleepy, he had walked her to his basement. In her dazed state, she helped him remove her clothes, thinking sex would be coming next, not death. As she drifted deeper into unconsciousness, he got his tools, a knife, hack

saw, bolt cutters and a pair of wire snips. He carefully slit the skin between her white breasts. The blood was less than he imagined. He was happy when the cutters worked to cut the ribs apart. He hadn't wanted to mess the incision with the saw. The wire snips opened the artery and then it was over!

Next time he would do it when they were fully conscious. Maybe it would last longer if they were awake? He missed in Jenny's eyes the fear he had seen in the eyes of the man in the car wreck. But now he needed to get a new refrigerator for the basement! He couldn't have anyone reach into the fridge for a beer and pull out the heart, besides he would need the room. He knew who he was going to bring to his basement next and the one after that and the one after that and the one...

* * * *

Sandra and Lori hit it off immediately. After the first few sentences, they each seemed to know what was going through the others mind. Sandra was the first to finish a sentence started by the other. At the end of the meeting, the handclasp turned into a hug.

Lori drove back to the school buoyed by the feeling of meeting a true friend. Even the snarling comments of Kawalski at her taking a half-day of personal leave didn't bother her mood. She smiled when she thought of the surprise everyone would get on Friday. Sandra had told her that she would time the serving of the subpoenas so Kawalski, Shermom and the school board members would all receive them that afternoon. Lori decided to stop by James' place after school and tell him the good news.

When James heard the knocking at his front door, he stopped piling old firebricks against the walls. He didn't know if they were enough to stop a bullet but he had no other ideas. The knocking continued. He placed the brick in his hand against the wall and went to the back of his trailer. A rapid survey of the back yard revealed nothing out of the ordinary. Carrying his shotgun, he went out the back door. He peered around the corner of the trailer prepared for anything but Lori. He tried to speak but nothing came out. Clearing his throat, he finally got out, "Hello?"

Lori jumped when she heard the voice from her side.

"Sorry. Didn't mean to startle you. I've had some trouble so I've had to be careful checking who was at my door."

"I heard..."

Lori broke the awkward silence, "I've got good news. The union is filling charges against Shermom and Kawalski. Our lawyer, Sandra, thinks the State might even file criminal charges of blackmail against them..."

"That's good news but I'm not sure if that will help me much. I think I'm out of teaching. The district will never hire me back. With Jenny dead, I'll always have an open record of an investigation of having sex with a minor. The new background-check laws mean that no school will hire me."

"Jenny's dead? What happened?"

"You heard about the body found in Deer Lake Falls?"

"Yes."

"That was Jenny. It was pretty bad, and her being seventeen and all, they aren't releasing her name. I found out because Hakanen talked to me."

"Who's Hakanen?"

"Oh, Henry is the deputy sheriff handling Jenny's complaint against me."

"They don't think you did it, do they?" For some reason, she thought that anyone would suspect James of murder bothered Lori more than Jenny's death. At the time, Lori dismissed her thoughts, because Jenny was a bitchy girl who always had a snide comment. But later that night, Lori would spend hours wondering if her dismissal of Jenny's death and her worry for James meant more.

"No. Henry stopped by to warn me." James hesitated. He didn't want to alarm Lori. "He thought when the reporters found out about her murder, they might track me down." His own explanation sounded lame to him but he realized the Lori was still in shock about hearing of Jenny's murder. He dropped his

explanation with a pause.

"Thanks for telling me about the suits against Shermon and Kawalski. But you'd better leave now. Those kids that attacked me might come by or maybe that preacher might hear about you being here by somebody driving by." James had walked up to her and was trying to lead her back to her car. He was having trouble leading her away. She smelled good. He hadn't remembered how good a woman can smell to a man. He had forgotten until now how, when he had been courting his ex-wife in college, he would bury his face in her hair to catch her fresh clean scent beneath the smell of her perfume. As he walked her to her car, he kept stumbling. Somehow the hand he was using to guide her to her car kept interfering with his walking.

Lori pulled away. "No. I don't care if they know I came here!"

"But I care."

The sadness in that statement stopped her. Before she recovered, she was in her car and he was walking away, his shoulders slumped. Lori drove away. She made it back to her apartment despite the tears that she couldn't understand clouding her eyes.

* * * *

The killer snuck into the school's bus garage and stole a sledgehammer from in back. He was going to kill Jenny's pimp. The sledge was for any of the pimp's friends, if they were around.

The killer found Pike skulking in the back corner of the school parking lot waiting for the baseball team to finish practicing. Pike alertly scanned the parking lot for any cops. With both Arne and John still in jail, he was worried about being caught selling his little bits of joy to the baseball team. Pike saw the killer approach but dismissed him as a nobody just crossing the lot. As the killer continued to approach, Pike's thoughts changed to a new customer.

When the killer came closer, Pike heard the soft whisper, "I sure do miss talking to those young high school girls."

Pike's thoughts immediately turned to big money. Here was definitely any easy mark! He leaned close to offer a crude reply. Suddenly, something exploded in his midsection. As he gasped for air, sparks erupted between his eyes and then blackness.

The throbbing woke Pike slowly. He tried to move his hand to his throbbing head but nothing happened. As the agony in his head slowly retreated, new pains seeped in, shoulders ... elbows ... wrists ... groin ... knees. Slowly he realized he had to be dangling spread eagle, suspended by his ankles and wrists. He tried to open his eyes. They were crusted shut. He turned and twisted against his bonds trying to rub the crust from his eyes. The pain increased, nearly bringing back the blackness.

Finally, his left eye was open. He saw blackness. A dull red glow came from the left. He turned dazed. It took him minutes before he associated the red glow with heat he now started to feel. An electric space heater! Cold, clammy everywhere else ... A basement? Wait a minute! I'm naked!

Pike slowly drifted in and out of consciousness for minutes, hours or days. His mind only registered the pain and the hot red glow. Insanity and terror slowly crept in.

He woke to the unbearable glare of a single light bulb suspended from the floor joists overhead. He heard a noise. Turning his head, he saw a scrawny old man he vaguely remembered from when there was light. The old man had placed a metal bucket on the concrete floor of the basement. It must have been the noise that awoke him. The old man had placed a bar of soap and a towel on a chair near the bucket and was removing his clothes. The old man looked at him. He smiled. His mouth moved and from a distance Pike heard, "Don't want to get my clothes dirty."

Pike watched as the scrawny old man turned away and walked to a workbench at the far wall. As he followed the scrawny man's steps, he saw the stairs and the faint glow from the ceiling where a doorway to the outside must be. Pike watched the glow. He forgot the old man until he heard, "We don't

want you to bleed to death. No sir, we'z don't."

Pike jerked his head in pain to look at the old man who spoke those words. His vision blacked out for a moment. When it cleared, he saw the naked old man still smiling. In his hands was a small propane torch. Its flame was being played across the blade of a kitchen knife. The blade slowly turned a cherry red. Pike opened his mouth to scream but nothing came out. He felt a searing pain between his legs. As darkness descended, he finally heard a noise. He knew he was screaming for his mouth was open but the noise he had heard was a girlish giggle from the old man.

An incessant humming woke Pike up. It seemed to take him forever to place the song. It was the theme from the Brady Bunch! He smelled burnt meat. Why was he at a barbecue? "I must be drunk," he thought. He opened his eye and watched the naked old man washing something dark off his body into a bucket. He remembered! He opened his mouth to scream but all that came out was a small croak.

The old man turned. "Awake. Your throat must be dry. Here." The old man brought a sodden corner of the towel he was using to Pike's mouth. A squeeze and foul tasting fluid dribbled in.

"Why?" softly cracked from Pike's mouth.

The old man gave him the same sickly smile he had before. As the old man dressed, Pike's eye caught a flash of light off the old man's shirt. His eye focused on the flashing object. A uniform shirt ... embroidery ... letters ... What does it say? B ... I ... L ... Oh, my God!

The old man still had a smile on his face. "I see you finally recognize me. Well, I'll have to talk to you more later. I have to get this in the refrigerator upstairs and get to work." The old man held up a small plastic wrapped bundle. "You know a person would think these would be bigger, being how proud you were about fucking so many girls." Giggling, he reached up and pulled the chain on the light bulb hanging from the joists.

Pike watched the old man's shadow as he turned and walked up the stairs. The door closed. All Pike had left was the dull red glow of the heater and a throat so badly used that it could scream no more. Unconsciousness came as he tried to understand what the old man had done to him.

* * * *

The light turns on. Again the hands reach for the deck of cards._

This time the card has a yellow orb with a face on it. A winding road twists under the orb. The road travels from a pond with a crayfish between two howling, frightened dogs and two gray towers to the dark distant hills.

The hands hesitate, seemingly not wanting to extinguish the only light in the room. Finally, a_ *click*_ and darkness._

CHAPTER 9: The Moon

Frank read over the forensic report from the crime lab. He knew that it was a preliminary report with more details coming later. He only got it this soon because the press had gotten ahold of the story of Jenny's death and they had been putting pressure on the state offices of the BCA. There had been large gaps in the report. He had called the coroner and the lab to try to fill in the holes. His biggest surprise had been the inclusion of a partial profile of the killer that had been requested from the FBI.

Frank waded through the techno talk slowly, listing the facts that he thought he could use. The estimated barbiturate and alcohol level in her body was enough to incapacitate her but not enough to render her completely unconscious. Since there was no trauma to her brain, it was felt she had been at least partially aware of what was happening when most of her blood was drained. There had been shearing marks on one of her ribs and a knife wound nicking her right lung. The pathologist felt that the killer had no medical skill and had used a set of heavy-duty shears, like metal snips, to cut open her rib cage. The killer had then removed, at least, her heart. To mask the removal of the heart he had cut her open with the chain saw. The pathologist believed this because she could find no cardiac tissue in the body. She had

found trace tissues of all the other major organs except the heart in the body cavity. The pathologist had noted that a chain saw would shred tissue, carry some tissue in its teeth and throw pieces back into the wound when the chain came around again. No fiber analysis or analysis of the chain saw cut had been completed yet. There had been nothing of significance found under her fingernails and no semen had been found in or on her body.

The FBI profile had even less information, White male in his twenties or thirties, highly intelligent, a loner, asexual, abusive parents ... He lusted for notoriety and probably had copies of all the newspaper reports of the girl's death. He was antisocial...

Frank decided to give Henry a call. He needed local knowledge. He knew that he could trust Henry. This case was a career breaker. Frank looked out his motel window. Two TV news trucks were parked outside. He would have to meet Henry somewhere private.

* * * *

The old man had a headache. He had such a rush from cutting on Pike he couldn't relax afterwards. He had called a couple of friends and they had gone drinking. They had closed the bar they had gone to, five full hours of beer and whiskey. The old man went to the office and rummaged in a desk until he found a bottle of aspirin.

When the old man got off work, he prepared for his next visit with Pike. He got to the basement and found Pike gone. His body was still there and he was breathing but his eye was vacant. The old man prodded and cut him. Pike's mind didn't come back. A zombie's body just dangled from the floor joists. The old man felt tears flow. It was nearly over. Pike had gone too fast. Next time...

* * * *

Henry was worried. He reviewed his case notes and the information he had gotten from Frank. In the back of his mind he knew that something was missing, or wrong, in the information. Pike Borland was missing. He had to fit in the equation somewhere, but how? What did Jenny's complaint about Makinen have to do with her death? The events didn't logically fit together, yet they must.

He walked over to the window and looked out into the night. He sensed a presence in the darkness. He had looked out this window and watched kids play. Three winters ago a moose had trotted across this yard and last spring a small bear had ambled into view. Tonight he could see nothing but he knew something black matching the darkness of the night was out there.

Then Henry realized his mistake. The killer wasn't logical. He might be legally sane but his thoughts followed an insane path. Henry needed more information. He would have Al stick with the news reporters around the school. Everything seemed to be linked with the school. Al would have to take notes on everything happening at the school. Al looked like a reporter. Reporters got different information than police. He would ask Frank to run background searches on everyone that had access to the school. He would start interviewing people in and around their homes.

Henry wished he knew more about the crazies. Maybe when he talked to Frank about the background searches, Frank could give him some ideas about how serial killers thought. There, he'd said it. Could this be the work of a serial killer?

* * * *

Kawalski burst into Shermon's office. His immediate ranting was stopped when he saw the subpoena on Shermon's desk. Shermon was talking on the phone. His hand was raised, silencing Kawalski. It took a few minutes for Joe to realize that Shermon was talking to the district's lawyer.

Shermon put the phone down. "The school board members also received subpoenas. Joe, they have a tape of you trying to put the moves on Waithe. My God, Joe. Twenty years after Nixon and you never thought about a tape recorder?"

"How was I suppose to know? It worked before..."

"Joe, go home. Pretend that everything is fine. If you have anything else going on, just stop it." When Shermon saw Joe starting to say something he continued, "Hold it. Don't tell me or anybody else anything, just quit whatever plans you have. I will be talking to the district's lawyer tomorrow. I'll call you then. Remember, nothing to anybody."

They continued talking for a short time before Kawalski left. Shermon decided that it was time to cut his losses and run. A little pressure on the school board and he would get a favorable recommendation. It would be easy enough to put everything on Kawalski. A few backdated letters in Kawalski's file, questioning his ability and judgment ... The embezzling had been done through Kawalski's secretary, Amy.

Kawalski was big, mean and dangerous. The only problem Shermon saw was timing his betrayal so Joe would be in jail before he found out he was set up. But then, that should be easy. After all, Joe was pretty stupid.

Shermon leaned back in his chair. Where to go next? The South. He'd had enough of the cold winters. Besides, the South was notorious for poor State monitoring of the schools. It would be easy to start his own fiefdom. Why had he waited this long here?

* * * *

There is impatience in the hands as they reached for the next card. When they reach the deck, the hands hesitate. They had turned over the Hermit and the Moon. Would the next card be even worse? The card is flipped.

Eight staffs with green leaves sprouting from their sides fly across a green landscape.

The hands relax. The light is extinguished.

CHAPTER 10: The Eight of Wands

Lori woke Saturday morning, head throbbing, body weak and limp. Her sodden nightgown stuck to her flesh. The sweat-stained garment would pull away from her body when she moved, immediately causing tremors of chills to travel to her throbbing head.

In the bathroom, Lori took two Tylenol. She turned the shower on hot. She stood shivering on the cold tile floor waiting for the steam to rise from the shower. After Lori felt the heat roll from the shower, she threw her sodden gown to the floor and stepped in. Under the hot spray, she leaned into the wall and waited for the streaming water to soak into her body.

As the Tylenol and hot water slowly worked on her throbbing head, Lori was able to think back over her night. She had twisted and rolled and turned until her bed covers had pulled loose. She had opened her eyes to watch the red digital clock change from one to two to three o'clock. She had drifted into a fretful sleep and would wake to sadness. Finally, when the sky started to turn pink, she had fallen into a sound sleep. When she woke, before she had moved, she remembered the essence of a dream, sadness and being all alone. She had moved and her head exploded in throbbing pain.

Lori took a bar of soap and slowly started to lather. As her hands traveled over her body, a face to the sadness appeared in her mind, James. It took Lori a while for her to realize her hands were doing more than washing her body as she soaked under the hot water. She left the shower more confused than when she entered.

Lori dressed, and made breakfast. She turned the Saturday morning cartoon shows on, anything to escape the sadness. Nothing worked. She thought about calling her father but didn't. She thought about shopping or calling friends. Finally, she got into her car to drive to her father's. Suddenly she realized, she had turned the wrong way on the road.

Lori knocked on James' door. She turned to watch him appear around the corner of the trailer. She saw the sad loneliness in his eyes that had kept her from sleep last night.

Lost in their despondency she said, "We need to talk."

She entered the trailer and saw the walls of the living room had been lined with old firebrick up to the height of about three feet. The unusual

sight of broken brick lining the inside of a room gave an eerie desolation to the trailer. The stark bareness of the room with the mismatched furniture broke down her last restraint. She started to cry. Wrapped in the misery that engulfed her, she felt an arm go around her. Behind the tears she couldn't stop, she felt herself being guided to the floor. Sitting there her back touching the cold bricks, she gave up trying to control her tears and buried her face into Jim's shoulder.

Jim sat with her, holding her gently until her crying stopped. Her head was tucked under his chin and with every breath, he could inhale her fresh clean scent. She had fallen asleep! His hands gently stroked the side of her face. He tried to remember the last time he had touch the soft gentle curve of a face, but a mist of loss engulfed his mind and he slept.

Jim woke still holding her. The tears had dried on his shirt. He felt their crustiness contrasting with the soft warmth of Lori's body. He slowly eased her sleeping form to the floor. He gently rocked her glasses off her face. The soft warmth radiating from her cheek seemed to burn his hand. His dreams over the last few days took control of his hand and he slowly traced the soft curves of her body. He tried to move and pain shot through his body. His legs had fallen asleep.

Jim writhed on the floor in agony, careful not to wake Lori. After a few minutes, he was able to move. He crept into the bedroom to get a blanket. Gently covering the sleeping woman with the blanket, he left the trailer to do a perimeter check of his property. Finding nothing, he sat in a chair and watched the rhythmic rise and fall of Lori's chest as she slept curled up in a fetal position.

It was late evening and the setting sun was casting an eerie red glow though the room when she woke. She rolled from under the blanket and onto her back, stretching her cramped legs. In the red glow, Jim viewed the rounded curves of her lithe limbs as she moved.

Jim packed away the ache of desire he felt for Lori. "Good, you're up. I'll make us something to eat. You can move around. Just stay away from the windows." Jim lit an oil lamp, and in its dim light, started to make a meal. He sensed Lori walk up to him. Turning to her, he saw her nose crinkle pulling her lips apart in one of the most erotic gestures he had ever seen.

"Do you know where my glasses are?"

Jim never found out how long he froze. His mouth hanging open, forgetting to breathe.

The lips moved again, "Do you know where my glasses are?"

Breathing, "Yes, here ... I'll get them."

The rest of the night and most of Sunday was a blur to them. They talked. They ate. They napped. But neither touched the other. They knew what would happen if they touched. The fear of what was happening to them forced them to delay. Finally, Sunday afternoon came and Lori went to her car to leave. There by the open car door they kissed for the first time.

Their delay had done nothing to control their desires. Each tried to absorb the other in their embrace. They finally parted, trembling, neither knowing why nor what was happening. Jim called his children and talked for an hour. Lori stopped by her father's home and talked till morning. Both ended the weekend more confused then when they started.

* * * *

The hands reach slowly for the deck. They seem to know what the next card will be. The card is turned over.

A tower struck by lightning and on fire appears. A man and a woman tumble off the tower and past a rocky cliff. A yellow crown is blasted away from the dark tower by the lightning and fire.

A sigh can be heard from the figure behind the hands. The light is turned off and darkness shrouds the room.

CHAPTER 11: The Tower

Every county in North Eastern and Central Minnesota has dozens of

lumber mills. Some are small one-man or single-family operations. A few are large-scale productions run by the international lumber companies. But the most notable are a fascinating combination of high tech and low tech that is characteristic of a medium-size company. This particular mill was large enough to take full-size trees and cut them up into lumber. Anything left over would be fed into a couple of wood chippers and the resulting chips would be sent to a paper mill.

Trucks with full-length trees would drive into the mill and either a hydraulic crane or a front-end loader would unload the truck. The trees would be placed in a single layer on a table one hundred and fifty feet long by sixty feet wide. Running the length of the table were twelve chains with six inch long links. A cogged sixty-foot long shaft would move the chains in unison to a feeding table, which would bring a tree one at a time into the mill. The first saw the tree would get to was a ten-foot circular blade that would cut the tree into bolts. The bolts would then be fed into either a chipper or another table to be cut by a bank of saws. Throughout the mill in a haphazard manor would be troughs and chutes, each with its own huge chain moving chunks of wood to saws, chippers, or scrap piles. Men with shovels, forks, and pickaroons would clamber all over the troughs, cleaning out tangled or jammed splinters of wood. Every few months, a man would get a limb caught in one of the hundreds of moving chains and belts. Injuries would range from minor lacerations and amputations to the occasional death. The result was an agglomeration of emergency _off_ switches scattered throughout the mill.

It was an hour into the seven o'clock shift when the emergency off switch for the feed chain off the scrap hopper under the tree chipper was pulled. Bells rang, lights flashed and the ten men who worked in that section of the mill came running to the location. The man assigned to keep the feed chain clear had already straightened out a problem on the bolt table and a clogged chute in a chip blower when he got to the hopper. The man had hit the emergency switch and thrown up at the same time when he saw the two severed legs dangling from the side of the feed chain trough. The man had then fainted when he had walked farther into the hopper room and saw the mass of red tissue and wood scraps piled under the two-foot steel cog driving the hundred-foot chain.

It would take investigators five more hours to collect the remains of the body and a court order to keep the mill owner from turning the equipment back on before all of the on-site forensic work was done. It was ten AM on Tuesday when enough teeth had been examined to positively identified the remains as Pike Borland.

There were twenty officers in the Monday afternoon meeting in the sheriff's department's largest room. The BCA lieutenant, Frank, led the meeting. Although there was no positive identification yet, everyone assumed that the body found at Borgquist Lumber was Pike Borland's. A deputy who knew Borgquist was given the task of summarizing to the group what was known of the mill's operations.

The young man began, "During the week, the mill is currently running three crews on staggered shifts. The seven o'clock crew cuts and processes the lumber. They quit at four o'clock. They were the ones to find the body at about eight Monday morning. The eight o'clock crew packages and ships out the lumber. They quit at five o'clock. Because of the unusually heavy spring demand this year, Borgquist put on a four o'clock crew. They finish any remaining shipping for the day and clean up the mill for the next day's running.

"No one on the four o'clock crew saw the body on Friday, although they did clean up the hopper area. On Saturday, there is a skeleton crew to unload any lumber trucks that arrive at the mill. They only work in the tree yard, the truck scales, and the garage where the two Caterpillar front-end loaders are kept. No one checks the hopper area during the weekends until Saturday night when the watchman does a walk-through of all the buildings. He does another walk-through on Sunday afternoon. Other than the two building

walk-throughs, he mostly stays in a small guardhouse at the main truck entrance to the mill. There are five entrances to the mill area, none with gates. The two hundred-acre mill complex has a thirty-acre production area with a dozen buildings, truck and car parking with loading and unloading areas. The truck park usually starts to fill up around five in the morning with trucks waiting to get unloaded. The remaining one hundred and seventy acres are divided into five yards, near and far tree yards, near and far lumberyards, and waste yard. The whole complex has about twenty miles of roads. The night watchman does drive through the yards every one to two hours, but he is primarily there to keep kids from having keg parties in the yards and to prevent vandalism."

Frank asked, "Why the large size of the yards?"

"This is not one of the really large mills. They don't have the huge drying kilns of the major logging companies. They dry their lumber by letting it season a few months in the sunlight and that takes a lot of room. They had only about a hundred acres up to fifteen years ago until Borgquist bought old man Holgren's farm when he retired. Borgquist had been crowded when he started his mill, so when he got the Holgren farm, he spread out his yards so he would have plenty of room."

"Do we have a closer time to when the body could have been placed on the hopper chain, and could the watchman have been involved?"

"The closest time I could confirm was sometime after three o'clock Sunday afternoon. As you can imagine, the mill jobs are not that good. Most of Borgquist's manual labor only stays for a few months to a couple of years. His current night watchman was given his job after working on the sorting crew for twenty years. I know he couldn't get a job at a grocery store because he couldn't read the labels on the cans. He wasn't involved. He could never remember his lies for more than a few minutes."

Frank continued talking to the gathering. "You all should have looked at the preliminary reports I handed out earlier. So we have a killer who likes to slowly kill his victims. That's my interpretation of the coroner report on Jenny Rossetti's body and the fact that Pike Borland had been missing for a few days. The man or men have to have a secure place to do their killing and an intimate knowledge of the area. He or they knew about the neighborhood dogs, how to get in the lumber mill, and where to place the body. He or they are using their knowledge of the area to destroy evidence but also to terrorize. He wants everyone to know what he did. He wants the fear and knowing that he is causing it."

"Now, something that you might not have realized. At least some of you, if not all of you, must know the killer or killers. I have worked serial murders before. The killer's actions blend in with the neighborhood. Anything unusual about their actions is so minor that it is only discovered after the killer is caught. This killer has left us clues."

"He knows the school, the residential area of Deer Lake Falls, and Borgquist Lumber. My guess would be that he also had personal contact with the two victims before he killed them. I have no idea what the contact was, but they somehow caught the attention of the killer. Any questions or comments?"

A general shaking of heads 'no' followed.

"The ten men assigned to the homicide task force stay. The rest of you can leave. Those leaving, keep your eyes and ears open. You know what we're looking for. Contact the task force with any information you discover."

Frank waited until the noise and disturbance of those leaving quieted. "You all know Henry?" Frank waited until the nods and murmurs of greetings settled down. "He's my second in command. If you get anything and I am not around, you contact him immediately. Any questions? Good!"

"Al, you, Mike, and John are assigned to the school. You check out any information that comes in about the school. I want at least one of you around the school property while it is open. You will be able to request additional officers for surveillance during the loading and unloading of busses and for any public events, such as the baseball game on Friday."

"Chris, John Pietila, and Fred will take care of anything that involves Deer Lake Falls.

"Dave, Bill, and Vernon will take the mill. Vernon will also coordinate any information between the three groups.

"You will start by making lists of people in your areas whose names come up in the investigation. I want you to list all the names. You are not looking for just the killer or killers right now, but on any way those three sites could be connected.

"Vernon, you will keep an updated list of all the names divided into three categories, matching on all three, matches on two, and names that came up. I want all three groups to check on changes in the lists every two hours. Everyone on the task forces will be working at least double shifts until further notice.

"Any questions? Good! Get to work!"

After the rest of the men left the room, Henry walked up to Frank. "I want to try to force something to happen. Maybe ... get the killer to make a move he hasn't planned."

"What do you have in mind?"

"The county attorney contacted the sheriff's department to investigate a blackmail and extortion complaint against the school district. The teachers' union has filed civil charges against the superintendent, principal, and school board. The union's lawyer notified the county attorney of the filing for possible criminal action. Remember that Jenny had filed a sexual-assault complaint against James Makinen and then the school immediately fired him with no investigation.

"I know there doesn't seem to be a connection between the cases, but something about the whole thing bothers me. I want to shake up the whole school administration and see what falls out."

Frank hesitated. Attacking a school administration and board could be political suicide. Not finding a killer was also a job destroyer. What if he cut Henry loose?

"Okay, Henry. You can put the pressure on, but be careful. If you step on anyone's toes, you are on your own."

Henry stared at Frank until he looked away. He had hoped that Frank had more backbone. With his backing, it would have been much easier to apply pressure. Maybe he could see if the county attorney knew someone in the Attorney General's office. A State audit of the schoolbooks would really get everyone's attention.

* * * *

The old man relished the fear that penetrated the school after the news of a body found at the mill spread through the building during the noon lunch period. It didn't have the same satisfaction as killing, but he could still feel the power of the fear that he controlled.

It was during the sixth-hour class time, while he was sweeping the hall by the ninth grade lockers, when he saw a girl with her head buried in her locker. The old man dumped the load of dirt and paper that he was pushing with his dust mop. Without the paper, the mop was absolutely silent as he pushed it across the floor. The girl closed the locker door. Turning, she stifled a scream when she saw how close the old man was to her. She smiled at the awkward looking old man holding the broom and left for class.

The old man stood in the hall, his grip on the broom slowly turning his knuckles white. The janitor played through his mind the fluttering throbbing of the startled girl's throat. The fast pulsing of the heart as seen through the smooth white skin of a young girl's throat froze him there until the bell rang at the end of the hour.

After school, the old man was surprised when Amy, the dotty old fool of a secretary, asked him to walk her out to her car for protection. The janitor heard loud voices coming from the Superintendent's office when he got back to the building. He pushed his cleaning cart next to Thelma's desk. Picking up her wastebasket, he leaned against the door to the inner office. He heard

Kawalski ranting about Makinen and Lori, and the worries of the blackmail investigation. A final angry oath came from Kawalski. He moved quickly away from the door. As it was, Kawalski pushed the old man into Thelma's desk as he bulldozed his way to the doorway.

The janitor finished his cleaning in a dazed state as he planned his next moves. The same sappy lopsided grin that had lulled the high school girl into complacency was plastered on the old man's face. Outside as the janitor left the building, Al Gallea saw the grin and dismissed the old man as feeble. He never even noted the old man on his log of whom entered and left the school for that day or the way the old man stopped to stare at the cars in the parking lot.

* * * *

James woke again from his night terror. After spending the night in fitful naps, he finally remembered the terror that woke him. He was looking down on Lori. She had been split open from chin to crotch. Each layer like an onion peeled back and pushed to the side. At first, all he could see was her white chalky face. The terror began when he looked below her face. The split blouse was peeled back first followed by the bra, the inside of its cup facing outward. The skin had been sectioned next. The pocket of skin making up the breast placed within the cup of the bra. Next, the muscles were peeled back and laid across what had been pulled back before. The ribs were wrenched apart. Inside the chest cavity, the heart was gone. Jim stood over her paralyzed. As he struggled to move, he fell in slow motion. The closer he got to Lori's body the more detail he saw, the weave of the material making her blouse, the jagged edge of the cut flesh. The instant before he touched her, he woke.

Jim got out of his sweat-soaked bed. The muted sunlight penetrated the bedroom's gloom, illuminating the brick lined walls. In a pain-filled rage, James threw himself against the brick walls, as if he were a caged animal.

Bruised and exhausted he showered. He would not let himself be caged. First he had to protect Lori and then attack. He remembered reading a story about some military leader. The phrase the book used repeated itself though his mind. "The best defense is a good offense." He was not going to be on the defense anymore!

* * * *

Al Gallea saw Makinen's car pull up in the school's parking lot. Al's adrenaline surged. Henry was wrong! Makinen was the killer! Why else would he be here?

The car pulled next to one of the three vehicles left in the school parking lot. Al checked his list to find the car belonged to Lori Waithe. As Al waited, his hands began to sweat. He kept rubbing them on his pant legs, unaware that a large stain was forming. Al saw two people leave the building.

One had to be Lori and the other was another teacher, Mike Garrison. He watched Makinen get out of his car. Al couldn't hear the discussion between the group but Mike soon left. He saw the discussion between Lori and Makinen become more animated.

Al slowly got out of his car. He felt the chill on his pant leg where the sweat from his hands evaporated in the cool evening air. Al walked through the grass at the edge of the parking lot. He wanted to get as close as he could before the two arguing noticed him.

Suddenly, Lori fell into Makinen's arms. Damn ... Damn ... Damn! A lover's quarrel. Al backed up to one of the trees lining the parking lot. He looked back across to the school and wondered if he had missed seeing anyone leave. When he turned back, Makinen and Lori had gone back into their cars and were leaving the lot. A small movement on the far side of the lot caught his attention. Al was about to investigate, when the owner of the last car left the building.

* * * *

In the bushes, the old man started repeating a new mantra, cop, Makinen, Lori, Kawalski. Cop, Makinen, Lori, Kawalski. Cop, Makinen, Lori,

Kawalski! The cop was armed. The old man would need something special for him. Makinen and Lori would be easy, but Kawalski was huge. The old man would need something special for him as well.

Why did Kawalski and the cop have to interfere with his pleasure? The old man left for home. He removed from the refrigerator the bundle he had from Pike. He left the penis and testicles in the wrapping. He had removed Pike's heart as an afterthought. He had killed Pike by inserting old chopsticks into his body. He had cut a slit in Pike's chest and inserted a chopstick into his lung. He had watched, for ten minutes, the end of the stick jiggle with each breath he took. Before Pike stopped moving, there were a dozen sticks inserted throughout his body.

The old man took the scumbag's heart and sliced it into a fry pan. He cooked it with onions until it looked like normal leftovers. Putting it in a dish, he brought it out to his backyard for the neighborhood dogs and cats. He sat in a rocking chair by his back window, watching the dish. In his mind, he planned on how to get rid of the two interferers quickly so he could take his time with Lori. He would save pieces of her to show Makinen when he came next. A cat was chased away from the dish by a stray collie. A smile came to his face when he saw a shepherd started a fight with the collie. He rocked the evening hours away to the sounds of fighting animals.

* * * *

Lori felt the comfort of sleeping in her old room. She had sensed the terror emanating from Jim when he asked her to leave her apartment. She had been surprised when he had suggested she stay at her father's. At first, she had tried to argue with him. The haunted look on his face stopped her. She knew he was in danger as well. If he was too worried about her safety, his danger would increase.

They had pulled into her father's driveway together. She usually stopped by her old home at least a half a dozen times per week. She knew her father was lonely since her mother died a year ago. They never talked much about her mother. They just took comfort in being together.

Lori saw the roguish grin on her father's face when he opened the door. She felt her face flush when she realized he was looking over her shoulder at Jim. Her father's grin increased as she struggled through introductions. Somehow the presence of the two men in her life overwhelmed her. She excused herself to go to the kitchen to make coffee.

When she got back, Jim was gone and there was a worried look on her father's face. The rest of the evening went poorly. Neither wanted to talk about what was happening. Her old room felt safe but the blackness on the other side of the window seemed to press in.

* * * *

Henry couldn't shake the feeling that someone else was going to die soon. He tried to push his thoughts aside. He knew that he was responding the exact way the killer wanted him to. The killer wanted the power and control his actions caused to dominate the world around him. Henry coldly analyzed the facts of the investigation, reducing his emotions to a clinical study.

Al slept like a baby, content in his own world, unaware that he was marked.

Kawalski turned and twisted in bed, anger burning. The fear of being set up going through his mind.

James drove up and down Lori's street again. Seeing nothing, he parked his car and got out. Fading into the darkness of the nighttime neighborhood, he continued his hunt.

* * * *

*Click*_. Hands turn the card in deliberate firmness. The light from the lamp lasts only long enough for the observer to catch a glimpse of a woman sitting in bed, head bowed, face covered by her hands with nine swords suspended in the air above the bed._

Shermon couldn't understand how, in just a couple of weeks, he had gone from having possibly the best day in his life to the worst. Jack Andrews, the school district's attorney, had called him at eight that morning and informed him that he was no longer authorized to sign any checks or transfer any of the school district moneys. When he asked how was he supposed to handle the school district's business, he was told that he, Andrews, and one school board member could sign off on any disbursement. It was an hour later that his bank called to tell him that the sheriff's department had subpoenaed his bank records. The remaining hours of the morning had been spent arguing with Kawalski on how to save themselves. He knew that Kawalski would try to cut a deal with the county prosecutor's office. He was trying to decide if he should run or try to cut his own deal, when a knock was heard from his door.

What more could go wrong? The door opened and the janitor pushed his cart into the office.

* * * *

William Jones was sixteen when he became infatuated with Julie Jenson. She was a fifteen-year-old that had moved into the house at the end of the block that summer. William never knew anything about seduction. He did know that Julie seemed lost about moving into a strange town. William knew he had to make his move before school started. William was a scrawny kid with poor coordination. He never played any sports in school. He only had two friends that were even lower in the school's pecking order than he was. Julie was not very pretty but she had already developed large breasts. Once school started, William was sure she would start going with members of the football team and leave him.

It was late in August when William convinced her to go out to an abandoned shack just outside of town. He had been stealing a beer at a time from his father for the whole summer. His hoard now numbered twenty bottles of beer and a bottle of whiskey he got from pouring the half-empty glasses his father had drank before falling asleep at night back into the bottle.

At first, Julie wasn't very friendly but after a few beers she let him grope her breasts. As Julie slowly became drunk, he removed her clothes. He was already fucking her as she lost consciousness. For the rest of the hot late-summer day and into the night, William sat naked drinking beer and whiskey. Whenever he finished a beer, he mounted the unconscious girl. He finally stopped after she threw up on him while he was fucking her.

It was something William never understood. After that hot August day, Julie never let him see her alone. William had thought that after that day, they would be boyfriend and girlfriend. He had fantasized about how high he would rise in the school's pecking order when he put his arms around the large-breasted Julie in the halls between classes.

It was the first week in October when William knew something was wrong. He had just gotten home from school. His father was sitting in his ratty old sofa chair with a half empty bottle of Yukon Jack on the coffee table in front of him.

"Boy! Get right here!" his father snarled, pointing to the front of the chair.

William stood where his father pointed. The next thing William remembered was lying against the living room wall, blood dripping from cuts along the left side of his face with a ringing in his ears. His father had grabbed the collar of his shirt, causing him to gag and choke whenever he shook him. The fetid alcohol-soaked breath of his father penetrated his senses as his father screamed at him.

From a vast distance, the words his father screamed slowly found focus in William's mind. "Knocked ... Knocked up ... girl ... stealing booze ... stealing my booze ... if you can't keep your pecker to yourself..." Finally, unconsciousness brought oblivion to William.

William never saw Julie again. Her family left town before she could start showing her pregnancy. That same month, the cast was taken off the broken arm his father had given him and his grandmother forced him to marry

his third cousin. He had just turned seventeen. His cousin was nineteen years old and already divorced. Her ex-husband was serving fifteen to twenty years in Illinois for armed robbery.

It was two years later when his father showed up at his apartment with papers to sign that he finally found out what happened to Julie. The papers were for adoption of his son by her new husband. With his father and his wife looking on, he only remembered two things from the papers, the name of the town Julie now lived in, Sioux Bluff, South Dakota and the name of her new husband.

It was two decades later after his father died in a drunken brawl, that William started to look for his son. He did it carefully and slowly, afraid his wife would find out what he was doing. Over the years, his wife had grown meaner. She had resented the fact that the family had decided that she had to marry William to control him. As a reward, she became the matriarch of the Jones family after William's grandmother died. But the reward didn't last. When William's grandmother died, the family started to move away, those that weren't in jail. William's wife didn't have the strength of Mother Jones to control a whole family. She did, however, have the strength to control him.

* * * *

James saw the small news truck pull in. He had carefully watched over Lori through the night and followed her to the school. He had just stopped by his trailer for some food and a nap before he planned on starting his own pushing. The reporter was one of those perpetually bubbly young reporters that the small local TV stations hire straight from college. She had the standard short hair of most live TV news reporters, a small turned up nose and eyes that were open wider than average. The only thing that made her more human that a mechanical wind-up doll was a slight lisp to her voice. Through the edge in his curtains, James watched the reporter with her cameraman set up just in front of his steps.

James heard the introduction she taped through the thin trailer walls. "This is Debbi Nord-Schuler reporting for Action News 7 & 11. I am in front of the home of James Makinen, a former teacher in the Deer Lake Falls school district. Sources close to the investigation have told Action News that Mr. Makinen was being investigated by the county sheriff's department on assault allegations placed by the first victim, Jennifer Rossetti, at the time of her death. Sources have also told us that he has been linked to other assaults involving students in the district. We have been able to confirm that several incidents have occurred in the last few days involving Mr. Makinen. The sheriff's department has been unwilling to make any other statements concerning Mr. Makinen, stating that they do not comment on ongoing investigations.

"We have tried repeatedly to contact Mr. Makinen by phone, but he has not answered our calls. We do know that he has hired his own lawyer, who has also refused to make any statements."

She put down her mike. "Okay, Carl. Let's wrap it up here. I want you to pan across the trailer and focus in on the padlocked shed in back and the piles of brush. We'll set up for our next segment in front of Bodonavich, Finch, and Heiminien."

After panning across the trailer, Carl asked, "Aren't you going to see if he's home?"

"Why? Unless we get some comments from the cops, it will play better not to give the man a face. It scares the public more and there is less chance of getting into any liability trouble."

"Okay. Let's go."

James changed his plans. As the reporter taped her piece in front of his law firm, he walked up to their truck. He poured some used oil behind the back bumper. He had watched the cameraman open the back hatch to place the camera in the truck after filming at his place.

Acting like any spectator watching a news filming, James waited for them to come back from the steps of the law firm. The cameraman went down to

his knees when he stepped into the oil. James rushed up to help and to the astonishment of the watching reporter got the cameraman to his feet. Somehow in the resulting tangle, the camera was dropped into the old motor oil with the tape cassette lying next to it.

She yelled, "Carl, you idiot! Look what happened to the tape!" They both rushed over to the cassette. By the time the TV crew turned their attention away from the oil-sodden cassette, the man who had helped Carl had disappeared. All either of them could remember afterwards was the man looked average.

James wasn't much of a detective. He knew that if he waited, Lori might get hurt, so he attacked the only way he thought he could. He drove to the school.

He first went to the superintendent's office. Walking past the old man sweeping the floor and the secretary, Thelma, he opened Shermon's door. Inside he saw Shermon, his face pale with a lost look. As James watched him, he saw his face turn to red anger.

Before Shermon could say a word, James asked, "Do you know who killed Jenny and Pike ... Did you?" James watched the emotions play across Shermon's face as he tried to sputter out an answer.

Shermon finally sputtered out a weak, "Get out!"

James closed the door. He knew he had somehow gotten part of an answer, but what, he didn't know. He turned and saw the amazement on Thelma's face. The janitor never even looked up as he left for the principal's office.

Amy and a teacher with two students were waiting when James got to the office. He walked past them and opened Kawalski's door. "Do you know who killed Jenny and Pike?"

Before James could finish his questions, Kawalski gave a loud bellow and charged through the doorway at him. James slipped the out-of-control rush. Missing James, Kawalski tumbled into Amy's desk, spilling the computer and files on it to the floor. With an angry grunt, Kawalski got to his feet and rushed at Jim again, his hands outstretched, clutching for Jim's throat.

A coolness James had never known he had washed across him. In the back of his mind without conscious thought, he analyzed Kawalski's attack. He was coming in high, so Jim slid his left leg forward, his right hand cocked and ready at his right hip. As Kawalski's arms went over his head, James rotated his body forward and released his right fist. The fist rotated perfectly into a focused blow in the advancing Kawalski's solar plexus. Kawalski tumbled weakly to the floor, gasping.

James looked at the stunned Amy, teacher, and kids. Turning to Kawalski, he said, "You really are a slow learner. By now you should have known better than to attack me."

In a sharp voice James said, "Joe!" The still gasping Kawalski focused his eyes on Makinen. "The killing has to stop!"

James locked his eyes on Kawalski. Slowly he said, "Do ... you ... understand?" He waited until Kawalski finally nodded his head.

* * * *

Al Gallea saw Makinen drive up to the school. Only minutes later, he saw him walk out and drive away. Curious, he entered the building himself. Hearing a commotion coming from the principal's office, he entered. Kawalski was leaning against a desk, holding his stomach.

When he saw Gallea, he said, "You've got to arrest that crazy Makinen. He attacked me."

Looking at the others in the room, Al saw a teacher shake his head 'no.' "What happened?"

"Kawalski attacked Makinen." The others nodded their heads 'yes.'

Kawalski hissed, "You Son-of-a-Bitch, I'll -- "

"You'll what?" interrupted Gallea. Al had never intimidated anyone before but Kawalski was completely whipped. He mumbled something and left for his office. Al talked to the ones remaining.

Al immediately left the school. Going to the nearest minit mart, he

called the sheriff's station, asking for Henry. He did not want anyone with a scanner to hear what he was going to say. When Henry got on the line, Al blurted out, "You were right. Makinen is one tough son of a bitch. He just walked into the school and asked Shermon and Kawalski who killed Jenny and Pike. I think those two know something. His questions really shook them up. Kawalski even tried to attack Makinen. Makinen put him down without even trying!

"School is letting out now. I think you should come here with Frank. I think that if we put a little pressure on them now, they will tell us something. We will need to keep them apart so they won't know what the other is saying."

The busses and most of the faculty had left when Al got back to the school. There was already a deputy at the front of the building so he drove around in back. Al parked where he could see the other deputy's car and waited for Henry and Frank. He saw a flash of movement at a back entrance. It would start and stop. Curious, he walked to the back door. It was a steel utility door with only a narrow window. Seeing nothing, Al opened the door. He stood just inside the doorway waiting for his eyes to adjust to the sudden darkness. A flash and a pull across his stomach. He was on the floor! How had he gotten there? He was having trouble seeing. Finally, out of the shadows, he made out the figure of an old man leaning on something. At first he thought it was a broom. He wondered why the broom handle had a curve in it? He forced his eyes to focus. It wasn't a broom. It was a scythe, with a blade burnished white, except for a dark stain dripping from the shinny edge.

* * * *

Kawalski was tired, confused, and angry. The police showed up after school in force. The old deputy sheriff, Hakanen, questioned him. During the first few minutes, the questioning was simple stuff, but every time he opened his mouth, the old deputy would follow up with another question. He soon realized that he was telling the deputy everything. Kawalski had just decided to ask for his lawyer when another deputy hurried into his office. The next question surprised him. "Where is the other deputy?" After the blank look he gave the cops, they added, "The deputy that talked to you after Makinen left." The looks the cops gave him crumbled all of his resolve. He was scared of them, jail and Makinen. He had always pushed others around. Now everything was different, no one was afraid of him, but what hurt him even worse was the obvious disdainful disgust they showed him. Before the penetrating eyes of the old deputy, Kawalski confessed everything. He begged him to believe him. He blamed everything on Shermon. The deputy gave him a sheet of paper and told him to write everything down and sign it. He had tried to stop writing halfway through the first paragraph. When he looked up, he saw the uniforms, the strong young men with their hands resting on their holstered guns. He had felt ashamed and caged. The only place he could look without seeing them was the paper in front of him.

When he was done, he realized the school had become filled with cops. There were dogs being lead through the halls. There were others talking on their radios. Outside he saw the lights of camera crews. The old deputy took his confession from him. The look Hakanen gave him chilled his soul.

"Go home. We have work to do here. We will talk more tomorrow. Don't make it hard for me to find you. Understand?" Hakanen looked at Kawalski until he nodded.

Kawalski pushed his way through the reporters outside and drove home. He had not realized how long he had talked to the cops until he got to the dark of the parking lot. The flashing lights from the dozens of police cars gave him light to put his keys in his car ignition. Out of the lot, the darkness closed in around him. He pulled into his driveway. He sat in the dark car, trying to think for minutes possibly hours.

Kawalski opened his front door. Turning on his lights, he froze. Dangling from the stairway on the far side of his living room was a man's body. He could see a huge wound across the man's belly nearly severing him in

half. He could hardly make out the man's features. A rope had been wrapped across his face attaching him to the stair's banister. He took a step closer trying to see the man's face when a bright blur flashed in front of him.

The old man got his moving truck from the back of his pickup. Laying the truck flat on the floor he was able to roll the body on and wheel him out to his pickup. The old man wheeled the truck up the homemade wooden loading ramp and into the pickup box. The killer laid an old tire on top of the plastic-wrapped body and went into the house for the other corpse. The killer cleaned the house. The old man dusted and vacuumed humming the tune from _Snow White, Whistle While You Work_. He removed the dust bag from the vacuum. The old man placed a table lamp to highlight the dark bloodstain on the carpet and left the house.

Driving out to a bridge, the old man first scattered the dust from the vacuum bag and then threw in the scythe and empty bag. Eight miles out of town, one of the old man's drinking buddies was logging pulp for a local paper mill. He remembered that his friend owned a skidder and at one time showed him how it worked, the powerful diesel engine bulling the large machine through the woods running over small trees. Sitting high above the brush, he could gently press the controls and the machine would move. He helped his friend wrap steel cables around a dozen trees. With a slight increase above the diesel's idle speed, the wench on the skidder pulled the trees out of a marsh. The power of the machine now called to the old man.

The old man drove to the logging site. He climbed the short ladder to the cab of the John Deere skidder. Hot-wiring it, he drove it up to his pickup. Releasing the inch-thick skidding cable, he wrapped it around the bodies. Revving the diesel engine a few times, he winched in the bodies. He left the bodies hang from the back of the skidder. Tons of force had pulled the cable through the bodies, leaving the severed pieces dangling from the few shreds of tissue and plastic remaining between the steel loops.

The old man left for home. On the drive back he would occasionally caress the plastic wrapped bundles on the seat next to him. He had some more cooking to do for the neighborhood animals.

* * * *

The darkness surrounding the hands is nearly complete. From the deck another card from the suit of swords is turned over.

A woman, blindfolded and tied, stands between five swords on her left and three on her right.

The hands slowly reach for the light. The room plunges to black.

CHAPTER 13: The Eight of Swords

Henry was worried about the disappearance of Al. He was furious about the mess that Frank made interrogating Shermon. He had known Frank for years and had refused to believe the rumors that his impending retirement from the BCA was being forced upon him because of his loss of skills due to age.

Despite his worry over Al's disappearance, he was able to glean all the information Kawalski had. Once he started talking, he laid out all of his and Shermon's dealings, blackmail, embezzlement, extortion. He did have the presence of mind to blame everything on Shermon. Henry would have arrested him on the spot but for two things, his worry for Al and wanting to run the information about the case past the county prosecutor. He wanted Kawalski in jail. He knew from other cases he had against white-collar criminals, that small slipups during the arrest could lose a case in court.

He couldn't believe that Frank had lost the incentive with Shermon's interrogation nearly immediately. On top of that, he had let Shermon walk away after only a few minutes. Frank had started the search for Al but now Frank had disappeared. No one Henry talked to seemed to know where Frank had gone.

Henry was about to add Frank to the search when Nancy radioed him from the station. She told him that Frank had just informed her that he had arranged to get five more BCA agents and a few state troopers on the case and that they would be able to join the search by morning.

The relief of finally finding out about Frank released a floodgate of questions and facts. Henry knew that something important was missing. Everything he'd learned tonight didn't add up. What was happening? He was sure he knew something. He felt a tugging at the back of his mind. Something small was trying to catch his attention...

Agent Vernon walked past the principal's office door. When he saw Henry sleeping with his head propped up on the desk, he quietly shut the door and turned back to the turmoil of the temporary command post they had set up in the outer office.

* * * *

James spent the night prowling the neighborhood around Lori's father's home. He was beginning to learn the area and the area learned him. The dogs had stopped barking every time they caught his scent on the breeze. A couple of animals even sought him out to be petted. After Lori left for school, James knocked on the neighborhood doors with her father. They explained that they were worried about Lori's safety after the recent events. They asked them to keep an eye out for anyone not normally in the neighborhood and explained that James would be checking on things through the night.

After they were done talking to the neighbors, they went inside to have some coffee. Curious on how easily Lori's father accepted the situation, Jim asked, "Why do you accept what I told you? I show up on your doorstep with your daughter and tell you she's in danger. You don't know me. You must have heard the stories about what I've been accused of. I offer no proof that she's in danger. Yet, you've not questioned me. Why?"

"I know my daughter. You have to be someone special to her for her to bring you to my home. I trust her judgment."

Lori's father's face got a lost look with a faint smile hinting at the corner of his mouth. "Her mother was a very special person. Out of the blue, she would tell me to do something, not to take that road or to go and see a friend. Afterwards, I would hear that there had been an accident on that road or the friend had a death in the family. She never explained how she knew what had happened. Lori is a little like her. Maybe I've lived so long with her mother's premonitions ... I don't know, but when you said you were afraid for Lori, I knew you were right."

The front door banged open. "Dad? Jim?" When she saw them she continued, "The school is closed. A cop disappeared last night at the school. They had dogs and search teams going through the school looking for him. When I got there this morning, they were questioning all the staff about last afternoon. It took a couple of hours before they were done questioning us."

She turned and looked sternly at Jim. "I found out what you did yesterday."

Her father saw the small change come over her face. He knew it was pride he saw. Ever since she was in the second grade, she would try to hide her pride in an accomplishment by putting on a face of concern or indifference. The first time he noticed it was when she brought home her second report card of the year. She walked up to him with such a solemn face and handed over her report card. He knew something different was coming from the hesitation in her voice as she whispered, "I'll try to do better next time." There was only one S+ on the card. The rest of the grades were E's for excellent. When he looked up, her face burst into a smile and she dove into his lap.

He turned from her and looked at Jim. He lost track of the conversation as he concentrated on their faces. He saw it now with full clarity, what he had suspected earlier. Her pride in Jim was because she knew Jim belonged to her. Jim had to force himself to look away from her. When Jim did turn away, his movements became awkward and hesitant. A sad happiness washed over Lori's father. He had lost part of his daughter to this man. He wanted to be more upset but couldn't. She was happy!

He was still trying to sort out his feelings when there was a knock at the front door. He saw the sheriff's car in the driveway through the living

room windows before he got to the front door.

"Hello. I'm Deputy Sheriff Hakanen. I'm looking for James Makinen. I wish to speak to him about an investigation."

Something happened to Jeffrey Waithe. Something he never expected or would've believed if he had been told. Like all parents, he had protected his daughter Lori from danger, from any bad experience. He didn't quite understand how it happened as quickly as it did, but he now had to protect Jim. "Do you have a card? If I see him, I will tell him you are wanting to speak to him." He started to close the door.

"It's all right, Mr. Waithe. What is it you want to talk to me about, Henry?"

* * * *

Sandra couldn't believe what was happening. All the cases she had ever worked with had been straightforward and followed a predictable pattern. After all, she wasn't a criminal lawyer. The average corporate or civil case she handled was usually won by proving the fine print on a contract or waiver.

The first indication that something different was happening was the rabid TV reporter jumping her with a camera and microphone in the back parking lot of Bodonavich, Finch and Heiminen. At first, Sandra stood stunned by the sudden ambush. What finally broke her lethargy was when she realized that the reporter was using her non-answers as consent to her statements.

"So your client, James Makinen, has been questioned by the police about the recent murders."

Afterwards, Sandra never understood how she had the presence of mind to stop the reporter. She knew she had lost the incentive with the woman. She had to gain it back or both she and her clients would look guilty. She knew that no matter what was said, most court cases were affected by the popular press. But she didn't understand reporters! How could she get control back? She understood lawyers, not the press...

She gazed directly at the reporter and calmly asked, "I would like the name of your station's lawyer and his phone number, please?" She then retrieved her cell phone from her bag and waited for the number.

The reporter hesitated, "I don't know the name."

"Well, then give me your station manager's number and we'll go from there."

The reporter tried to leave at that point but Sandra followed her. As the reporter and cameraman retreated to their truck, Sandra finally got a number. She then stood in front of the vehicle so it couldn't leave the parking lot. Sandra watched the reporter's face blanch as she calmly dressed down the station manager and requested an immediate response from the station's lawyer.

After her conversation, she turned again to the reporter. "Ms. Nord-Schuler ... Is that right?" Sandra waited for the affirmative reply. "Mizzz Schuler. Never again come at me with a camera running. If you wish to talk to me, YOU will make an appointment. YOU will never again ask questions about any of my cases or clients without permission. If I find out that you contact any of my clients without first contacting my office or me, I will see that you will be sitting in court for the next six months. Do you understand, Mizzz Nord-Schuler? Good!"

Sandra then turned and left the stunned reporter. She knew in a way she was lucky this was a new reporter. If she had had more experience, she would never have been intimidated. But if she'd had more experience, the reporter would have been more circumspect in her initial questions.

That was just the start of the weirdness. This morning she heard the news of the deputy sheriff's disappearing and the closing of the school. The law firm was abuzz with rumors that people in the school were about to be arrested by the police. Jack Andrews, the school's lawyer, called at eight-thirty and requested a settlement meeting that morning. When she questioned him on who would be there, she was surprised that neither Shermon nor Kawalski would be. She put him off for a day.

She had to find out what was happening. She called the sheriff's department and asked for Hakanen, the deputy she had talked to earlier. She was told he was out on the search and couldn't be contacted. She then tried the county prosecutor's office but was again put off. She didn't know any other local people, so she called her office to see if they could get any information from the BCA state offices. She sat through the rest of the day, waiting for a return call and trying to discern what was happening.

* * * *

Henry had barely started to ask Makinen about yesterday's encounter with Shermom and Kawalski when his radio sprang to life. Nancy asked him to call back on a phone line. He asked to use the Waithe's phone. It was then he heard about another body found.

He left immediately for the logging site. There were ten police cars, the BCA van and a TV truck pulling up by the time he got there. Someone had had the sense to pull a logging truck across the entrance to the landing. Henry had to walk a hundred yards down the muddy access road before he got a clean sight of the scene. The macabre sight of the black plastic lumps dangling six feet off the ground from the back of a skidder rolled his stomach.

Men from the BCA and sheriff's department were still photographing the ground around the skidder. One man was dusting the skidder for fingerprints. Two others were trying to make casts of some footprints and tire tracks. Henry stood back out of the way and looked at the lumps, the bodies. The bodies! All you could see sticking out of the plastic was a single white hand with a small trickle of blood dripping to a small puddle on the ground, but there were more lumps than just one body could make.

Henry realized that Frank was standing next to him. "Do you know who the bodies are?"

"What?"

"The bodies?"

Frank looked again his mouth open. "Oh, my God! You're right. There is more than one body there."

In the anger of frustration, Frank erupted, "God damn it! Didn't anyone notice there is more than one body here?" Everyone turned away. No one wanted to catch Frank's angry glare.

"Easy, Frank. The boys are tired. It's the bastard doing the killing we need to get. We need to get the son of a bitch now!"

The forensic crew seemed to have finished. They stood to the side, waiting for the okay to lower the bodies.

Frank finally asked, "Is the coroner here yet?"

"He's still a few minutes away, Frank," someone answered.

"We'll wait for him. I don't want any mistakes. I don't want this bastard to get away because some bit of evidence was lost or mishandled."

They waited in silence, knowing who would be found in the plastic but not wanting to know. Using the excuse of not knowing to bear the tension of the waiting, the lined up men shifted their weight from one foot to the other. When the coroner walked up the road to the wood lot, he saw the macabre ballet of the men in front of the raised human sacrifice. For a minute, the coroner thought he was on the set of a cheap movie where someone stumbles on a cult in the process of offering a human sacrifice. This he knew would be the third body of this killer, without even checking. The killer's placing and mutilation of the bodies all had the same chilling affect. He prayed that when they opened the bundle, the killer would be dangling from the steel cable, not another victim. The men could change their minuet of horror to a dance of joy if only his prayer would be answered.

They lowered the bodies and for the first time knew in fact who the mangled remains belonged to.

* * * *

The hands remove the card from the deck. Something has happened. The hands move in jerky motions, sometimes reaching for the light switch,

sometimes the card. Finally they rest on the table and tap a beat not quite on tune. Somehow the unexpected has occurred._

The top of the card has a lion's head with wings mounted on the caduceus of Hermes. Beneath, a boy and a girl are sharing two cups in a pledge.

The hands finally reach for the light and plunge the room into darkness.

CHAPTER 14: The Two of Cups

Jeffrey had gone to the kitchen for a cup of coffee. It was nearly an hour since Hakanen had left. The TV stations had interrupted their programming with the information that another body had been found north of town. He believed James when he said his daughter was in danger. Normally, the coffee would calm him down instead his concerns for his daughter increased.

When he returned to the living room, James was asleep in the sofa chair. Lori was switching channels, trying to find more information about the newly discovered bodies. Watching them for a minute, he made a decision.

"I'm going out for a while. Be careful on who you let in and keep the doors locked."

"Yes, Daddy," came the slightly impertinent reply.

Lori looked at Jim, "You know, I don't think he has had more than a couple of hours of sleep in the last three days."

"I'll buy some groceries and then I'm going to talk to some of my friends at the VFW Post. You can call me there if you need me."

"Okay, Dad."

Lori watched Jim sleep for a while after her father left. He had sagged in the chair until his head twisted in an extreme angle. She decided to move him to her bedroom.

When she first touched him, he jerked awake, struggling, until he realized nothing was wrong. She whispered in his ear over and over that everything was all right and that he was going to bed. In the sleep-induced stupor, he let her lead him, stumbling, to the bed. She laid him down, covering him with a quilt from the foot of the bed. She watched him for a while. Tears formed in her eyes as she watched the peace of sleep erase the lost haunted look he had. She wanted to be part of that peace. She climbed under the quilt and eased his head between her breasts. Cradling his head in a gentle rocking motion, she fell asleep.

James dreamed of warmth and rhythmic motion. He smelled woman, heard a throbbing heartbeat, felt the rise and fall of a chest. From the dark embrace of sleep, he struggled to wake. He couldn't quite escape the clutches of sleep. Instead, he woke enough to match the rhythmic movement of the breathing. His hand had somehow penetrated her clothing. The hand moved against the warm soft flesh in time to the breathing. The tempo of breathing increased. One hand moved to the breasts and the other between the legs. In the soft dark embrace, they both moved faster. She shuddered and then went deeper into a sleep-induced serenity with only her breathing and heart keeping any beat. He continued to try to get the warm soft rhythm back, but slowly strength slipped away and sleep took over.

Lori woke first. She left him sleeping. At four-thirty, she started a meal for her father and Jim. The smell of food cooking brought Jim out from sleep and into a dazed state. The rumbling of his stomach registered as an alarm bell, forcing his body to move. Crawling from the bed, he stumbled down the hall until he found a bathroom. He washed the crust from his eyes with tepid water. He smiled at his reflection in the mirror as he remembered the dream he had. Was it a dream? He heard a door open from downstairs and a greeting between Lori and her father.

Jim stood in front of the mirror trying to remember. A knock at the door and Lori's voice said, "Take a shower. You need it. Supper will be done in fifteen minutes. Don't be late."

James needed time to think. He looked at himself in the mirror and

realized his hair was matted from sleep. He decided that a shower would help. He was lathering up when he heard a noise from the other side of the curtain and a cool breeze penetrated the warm moist air. Lori's voice came from the other side of the curtain. "I've got some towels for you on the stool."

He poked his head out from the shower. She smiled and said, "Hurry up. My father is hungry." He opened his mouth to speak but he didn't know what to say. Instead, he watched her smile and leave. He pounded his head on the tile wall in frustration and tried to remember.

Downstairs the table was set. Lori pointed to a chair for him to take. He wanted to say something but her father was here. He sat and tried to eat.

Jeffrey watched. Lori was happy but James seemed confused. Oh, well, that was how Lori's mother had always made him feel. He had never realized it till after she was gone. He loved the way she made him baffled. She was never boring. He would have to talk to James if he could get him alone. Jim needed to realize it would always be like that with Lori. But now he had some news.

"I talked to the boys at the VFW. They'll be coming over later to help. Now, before either of you interrupt, hear what I have in mind. Marion was a force-recon Marine in Vietnam and John was an Army ranger. I figure on having them set up in Swedmark's tree house; their boy is in college now. From there, they can watch the backyard and most of the sides of the house. Ben and I were both just Army grunts, so we will stay in the house. Bob was in the command center of an Aegis cruiser and Betty was a controller for an AWACS. Those two will take care of communications."

Jeffrey raised his hand, stopping Lori when he saw her open her mouth to speak. "Lori, don't say anything. Jim feels the killer could be after you. I believe him. You and I both know that Jim has been prowling the neighborhood at night. He can't cover everything. He needs help or he will get hurt." Jeffrey added the last to stop any arguments from his daughter.

"Jim, you know you can't protect the whole perimeter. You want Lori safe, don't you?" Jeffrey smiled. He saw both of them getting ready to argue. His comments about the other's safety stopped the possible altercation before it started.

* * * *

Henry walked up to Kawalski's door. He knew it would be empty, but a still clammy scent of evil seemed to emanate from the building. Behind Henry were a half a dozen BCA agents and sheriff deputies waiting to search the building. Henry had convinced Frank the he should enter Kawalski's home first. He had stopped by Kawalski's one time last spring to discuss a scheduling problem that came up with the county mandated D.A.R.E. program. Henry hoped that he could tell what the killer had touched or moved.

The front door was open. Henry stepped in and stopped. Only a few feet in front of the door a table lamp illuminated a huge dark stain on the carpet. Henry knew the killer had set the stage to display his work. Henry tried to examine the rest of the room without stepping in further. It didn't work. His eyes kept moving back to the only illuminated object in the darkened room. Finally, Henry went to the windows and opened the drapes.

Without the lamp being the only light source in the room, Henry was able to examine the room past the stain. He noticed that the furniture had been arranged as silent witness to the murder site. His hopes of finding evidence plummeted when he saw the vacuum cleaner with the open back and missing bag. Henry studied the scene. Kawalski was a big man. Except for the blood, there was no sign of a struggle. Gallea was a trained deputy and he was taken without a trace from a public school building with cops all around. How could the killer do that?

Suddenly it didn't matter to Henry. He removed his portable radio from his belt. "Base, this is Henry. Do you copy?"

"Henry, go ahead."

"Nancy, you contact everyone in the field. No one working on the case is to be alone. If you have to pull them in until we can get them a partner, do it."

Henry was about to say more when he noticed a flash of light coming from the stair's banister. He walked slowly over to it. The light had come from a gouge in the paint that had exposed the bare wood underneath. Henry noticed more scrapes on the painted surfaces and a few dark stains. He heard the noise of the forensic crew waiting to come in by the front door. When he turned to look, he saw the way the bloody stain and the doorway lined up with the scrapes. Something had been here, something to distract Kawalski. What could it have been? It was large, a good five to six feet of the banister and wall had scrapes on it. What would the killer use? Oh, my God! Al!

Henry rushed to the door. For the first time since his rookie year, Henry got sick. A couple of men from the forensic crew held his shoulders as he heaved.

After Henry emptied his stomach, he told the crew, "Sorry, guys. It shouldn't have happened. I just didn't expect..." He saw the worried look on their faces. He took a deep breath and continued, but this time as a professional.

"Kawalski was probably killed just inside the doorway. There's a lot of blood but no sign of a struggle. The killer took the time to arrange the furniture and clean the house. He used the vacuum cleaner and took the dust bag with him. You will need to check if anything useful got caught inside the machine or in the brushes. I think the killer was able to surprise Kawalski by tying something up to the stairway across from the entrance." The pause that Henry gave was unintentional. Somehow he needed a large breath before he could continue. "I think he tied Al's body there."

The somber crew entered the building. Henry turned to leave when a TV truck pulled up. He walked to his car, closed the door to the questioning reporter and drove away.

* * * *

Marion had hated Vietnam. He had nightmares about it for years. There were still times when he woke from sleep, dripping with sweat with the memories of war. But it was also the only time he had ever felt the intense fire of life burning within him. He sometimes wondered if the intensity of life during war was too much for the normal human to stand. The withdrawal from the burning clarity caused the problems that war veterans have, just like the withdrawal symptoms of the heroin addict. The one main difference was that war veteran lived with the withdrawal for life, while the drug addict could eventually leave the affects of the addiction.

Marion hunted. It wasn't the same intensity as war, but life and death were at stake, even if it was only an animal's. He looked at hunting like the methadone treatment for the heroin addict or the nicotine patch for the smoker. It was a way to tame the nightmares of war. When Jeffrey came to the Vets Club asking for help, Marion had to go. Up in the tree house, he scanned the neighborhood with night-vision goggles. John dozed behind him, waiting for his watch. He reached nervously for his bow, the fire of life starting to burn within him. At first, he was upset when Jeffrey had said no guns. He had not wanted a stray bullet to hurt anyone. Marion now relished the idea of getting close enough to a killer to attack with an arrow.

Marion prayed the killer would come. He had hunted deer with John and knew what they could do with their bows. In the house, Ben and Jeffrey had bats and knives. Ben was the legion baseball coach. Marion had seen Ben hit a line drive so hard it had broken the hand of the pitcher when he tried to catch it. He didn't know much about Bob or Betty, but they had been fast and precise on the radio calls. Marion's biggest surprise had been Makinen. After dark, he had watched James slip through the neighborhood as silently and quickly as a ghost. Marion had not seen James carrying any weapons when he left the house that night, but he projected the same lethal presence of his old gunnery sergeant. The man had served in the Korean War and was on his second tour of duty in Nam when Marion met him. There had been many times in Nam that Marion had been scared, but no matter what was happening, fear had never been an option when Gunny was watching. When Gunny was around, the only

emotion Marion had was pity for the enemy.

Marion shook his head to remove the memories. He reconed the neighborhood. Again, he wished the killer to show. He knew the killer was a coward; otherwise, he would come at you straight on, man to man, and not attack young girls. He wanted to see the scum's eyes as he saw his own death coming. Marion knew if the killer came, he would die. He had seen death in Makinen's eyes before he left on scout, and he knew the others would not hesitate to kill.

Marion saw a small truck pull up at the end of the block from Jeffrey's house. Into the radio he said, "Base, this is lookout. Ute pulled in at end of block. Doesn't match any of the neighbors' vehicles." Marion sensed John ease on up beside him. He knew John would be checking the area behind the house in case the killer would use a disturbance out front to sneak in the back way. Marion saw a shadow move at the end of the block and recognized the lethal motions of James.

Over the radio earphone he heard James whisper, "Negative on the Ute, it's a damn TV reporter." Just then the cameraman turned on the camera light and the intense beam flashed across the night-vision goggles, blinding Marion. "Damn! John, watch out for the light. I'm blinded."

It took minutes for Marion to rub the vision back into his eyes and even longer before he could see any distance. By the time he could see what was going on, Jeffrey was on the sidewalk yelling at the reporter and cameraman. Glancing down the road, Marion saw an old Chevy pickup idling closer with its lights off. "Base, this is lookout. Chevy pickup coming in with its lights off." Jeffrey must have had the radio ear piece still on because he stepped to the side to look down the road past the TV crew. The cameraman, seeing Jeffrey's movement, swung his camera down the block. The light from his swinging camera caught James in mid-stride as he raced through the yards to check the truck. Marion heard the squeal of tires and the truck's brights turned on. The truck backed into the night leaving only the smell of burnt tires behind.

Marion saw Jeffrey pull the camera away from the man and throw it to the ground. He heard the words, "You God damn fools! You God damn fools!" coming from Jeffrey as he pushed the TV crew toward their truck. He saw Bob come out of the house and grab Jeffrey, holding him back. With Bob holding Jeffrey, the TV crew started to scream back at him. The yelling kept up until suddenly the TV crew realized they were surrounded by the neighbors. They moved between Jeffrey and Bob and the reporters. The crowd didn't say anything, standing there, some in their nightclothes, watching the TV crew. They just moved closer and closer to the crew, backing them up to their truck.

After the reporters left, the neighborhood settled back to the stillness of the night. It was after midnight when the TV truck showed up again. It drove quietly down the street. Stopping by the broken camera, someone got out, grabbed it, and they drove off.

* * * *

The old man went to the VFW for a beer. He had been sure that with the cop dead, he would have a clear shot at taking Lori. When he had seen the TV reporters harassing Lori's father, he was positive he could sneak in the back and take her. Then that strange figure came out of the dark towards his truck.

It had taken him until noon to find out where Lori was staying after she had left her apartment. He didn't understand why the high he got from the slow killing of Jenny and Pike had worn off already. The delay in finding Lori put his nerves on edge. He had known it was too dangerous to try to capture either Kawalski or the cop. But God damn it, he needed the fix of torturing someone. Without Lori waiting for him in the basement, he had been so tempted to try to stop someone in the street to bring back to his house.

He took another sip of beer and closed his eyes. He remembered the feel of Jenny's heart in his hands and the wonder he had felt when he placed his own hand red with her blood over his chest. He took another sip and thought of watching the throbbing motion of the sticks he had placed near Pike's heart

and lungs and timing his own pulse and breathing to match. He felt again the merging of his body with their dying bodies. The thrill! The high!

A chill passed through the old man as he remembered the lethal shadow he saw surge toward him out of the night. Who or what was that shadow? What right did it have in interfering? He didn't fear the shadow he saw in the camera light. He had never really felt fear in his whole life. It was more a resentment of the shadow's interference with his plans. He had cowed to his father and then his wife not out of fear, but an avoidance of someone strong enough to keep him from his pleasure and to give him pain. His glass was empty.

He went to the bar to get another. For the first time he heard that Jeffrey had stopped by for help. He became angry at being thwarted. He gulped his beer. He would add Jeffrey and the others to his list. But first he would get Lori. He could imagine the pleasure of drinking with them in sympathy after Lori disappeared. Maybe he could keep her body in the chest freezer he just bought and installed in his basement. He could spend many nights drinking with them as they wondered what happened to her, hoping she was still alive.

This time, he ordered a whiskey with a beer chaser as he planned amid the loud noises of the busy bar.

* * * *

The light. The hands. The silent room. A barely audible swoosh _and a card turns over. The harsh glaring light from the lamp highlights the exposed card._

Rain clouds with a heart that has three swords piercing it points away from the shadowy figure behind the deck.

The hands flex, the figure sighs, the ambiguity of the card pervades the dark, silent room. Darkness.

CHAPTER 15: The Three of Swords reversed

The morning briefing at the sheriff's station was filled with silence. A few of the officers sat in a stunned daze, a hint of moisture formed along the edges of their eyes. The most profound change was in Frank. He had seemed to age twenty years over the night. His haggard face was filled with deep lines and lost sleep. He still held court over the assembled officers with professional control, but a lost, defeated essence emanated from him.

Henry was obviously tired and worn but he still had full mastery of himself and the job. The other officers slowly begin to turn to him for leadership. When a lab report had showed blood residue had been found near one of the back entrances of the school building, the assembled officers paused until Henry commented that he and Frank would go back over the site. After the briefing was ended, the officers waited until Henry nodded before they left.

As everyone left the room, Henry pulled Vernon aside. "Vern, I'd like to talk to you off the record?"

"Okay, Henry. What is it?"

"Frank is not holding up too well. I think we should keep an eye on him. Something happened to him when Al got taken last night. Maybe he's blaming himself. I don't know but I don't think he should be alone. He could get in trouble. I could ask one of the deputies to keep an eye on him but he's BCA. I don't want any trouble between agencies now. It's hard enough coordinating local police, three different county sheriffs' departments, the state police, and the BCA without getting into any rivalries. If Frank doesn't get his act together in time and lets something slip by, the whole investigation could be gone.

"Vernon, I know I can't order you. But if you could keep a BCA agent by Frank until he can get back up to speed, it would sure help."

"You're right, Henry. Al's disappearance and murder really threw Frank. I'll keep an eye on him. If you could keep it between us, I'd appreciate it."

"Of course! That's why I talked to you in private."

"And Henry ... I want to be there when we get the son of a bitch. I want to be there..." Vernon ended with a plea.

* * * *

The old man woke with a splitting headache. He started some coffee brewing. He got a towel, wrapped the last two ice cubes in the refrigerator in it, and placed it on his forehead. It didn't help.

Stumbling down the basement stairs, he went to his new freezer. He opened the towel and threw the two half melted ice cubes toward the corner floor drain. He picked up Jenny's heart, wrapped it in the damp towel, and rubbed it slowly across his head. He had hated to freeze her heart because he had loved the firm feel and resilience of the cool muscle. He had frozen the heart after he noticed a slight darkening to the compact red flesh. He had known that rot was only a few hours away if it wasn't frozen.

He took a deep breath of the cold freezer air coming from the small icebox. The relief of the cold compress permitted him to fully open his eyes. A smile played across the old man's features as he viewed his prizes, the small package containing the testicles and shriveled penis of Pike, the equally small bundle containing the cop's frozen eyes, and the larger mass of Kawalski's tongue. There had been more bundles of frozen meat he had taken on whim from his victims but they had been cooked and now resided in the stomachs of the neighborhood pets. He had remembered hearing Reverend Peterson preach about Ahab and Jezebel being eaten by dogs. Somehow the preacher's words about God's Judgment on the two stayed with him. He had become Elijah rejoicing in God's Judgment on the weak. The weak were sinners by their very being and deserved judgment. The feasting of the dogs was just retribution to the obvious sin of weakness.

He had decided to keep only one piece of flesh from each of his pleasures. It had been so hard to decide on which piece to save. Somehow an inner voice had talked to him through his hands on which parts to carve off the bodies. It had been much harder to decide on what to keep after the frozen packages had been made.

With his headache gone, he put Jenny's heart back inside the freezer. Upstairs he drank his coffee. Closing his eyes, he traced Lori's body with his hands. He could feel the tingling as, in his mind, he stroked her corpse searching for parts to save. Anyone watching from the window would imagine they were seeing an old man in the throws of an erotic dream, the slight smile and slow rhythmic hand motions. They would have looked around the room for a Playboy or an erotic video playing on the TV. Instead, all they would find was a Bible, a few newspapers turned to either sports or the business section, and ESPN playing on the TV.

* * * *

Frank and Henry walked through the back door of the closed school. Henry immediately noticed that the transition between the sunlit parking lot and the dark hall would blind anyone who entered for a period of time. The two men waited until their eyes adjusted to the gloomy hall. Henry saw the numbered yellow tag that marked the blood residue against the wall a few feet down from where they stood. Henry saw that the marker was opposite an empty doorway. The killer could have waited there for Al to enter the back door. Blinded by the dark hall, Al would have been easy prey.

Henry continued down the hall with Frank following in silence. A few steps down the hallway Henry smelled ammonia. He followed his nose to an open janitorial closet. Inside was a handcart, a mop with a bucket on rollers, and a huge industrial sink that looked like everything from the acids of the chemistry lab to last week's chili had been flushed down it. Once inside the closet, Henry saw the empty gallon container marked as disinfecting cleanser resting next to the roller bucket.

"Look's like this is where he cleaned up after ambushing Al back there."

Frank didn't answer. Henry looked and saw the emptiness in Frank's eyes. He repeated the comment and finally got a noncommittal, "Yeah," from Frank.

Henry continued down the hall to the front of the building. He walked

slowly trying to decide if the new information had narrowed the suspect list any. Henry figured that the ambush in back of the school was a little too cute for someone just from the area. The killer would either have had to work in the building or had gone to school here. The school had been built thirty years ago, so the best the new information could do would be to eliminate the one or two on the list that had moved into the area in the last few years and never worked in the building.

"We need to go over the employee list for the school again and talk to Shermon. We need some answers from him." Henry glanced at Frank. His ghastly pale face and vacant eyes stopped him in his tracks. "Are you all right, Frank?"

"Fine. Fine. I'm fine. I think I need to get a little rest. I've been up for nearly thirty-six hours. Could you check the employee records? We could meet at my motel in a couple of hours. After going over the records together, we could then talk to Shermon. Sound okay, Henry?"

"Sure, Frank. I'll see you in a couple of hours."

Henry sat in front of the computer screen. He had spent the last two hours checking the school's employee records with the notes compiled by the task force. He'd had to run background checks on two of the names. The results were zip. He had been unable to eliminate any of the names on the task force list using the new information. Everyone had either gone to the high school at some time in the past or had done some work at the building. Being a small community, everyone on the list seemed to have a connection to where the bodies had been found, a cousin worked here or a neighbor over there. The task force hadn't had time to see if anyone had a strong match on knowledge about the logging site. Henry felt something picking at his mind every time he looked through the employee list at the school. Something that wouldn't come up to where he could see it. Maybe going over the records with Frank would jar whatever was picking at his mind loose?

When Frank opened the door, he looked terrible. There seemed to be a slight tremor to his voice. The lines on his face had gone deeper, outlining his eyes and mouth with darkness.

"Henry, I need more rest. Could we put off seeing Shermon until the morning? It's already getting late," came the hesitant whisper.

"Sure, Frank. Do you need anything?"

"No. Thanks for asking, but all I really need is a few hours of sleep."

Henry went back to the station to make another run at the employee records.

Vernon walked in at about midnight. "You need a break, Henry. How about some of the sludge your boys call coffee?"

Rubbing the strain from his eyes, Henry replied, "Okay, Vern."

In the small break room, they sipped the coffee and munched on stale bars from the vending machine. Vernon asked, "What did Frank find out from Shermon? He hasn't turned in a report yet."

"What! Frank saw Shermon?"

"Yeah. The agent keeping an eye on Shermon saw Frank go into his house late in the afternoon. He had to have been inside at least a couple of hours."

"Damn!" The small thing picking at the back of his mind finally came to the front, Sioux Bluff! Frank had talked to him about growing up in a small town in South Dakota, possibly Sioux Bluff. It had been Sioux something or another. Frank had prided himself in how, living in a small town, everyone knew everyone else back forty years ago. Frank had just come back from a visit home. He had been depressed on how large the town had grown since the high-tech component company had started up.

Henry hurried to his office, leaving a confused Vernon behind. Searching through the employee records, Henry found Jefferson William Shermon graduated from Lincoln High School, Sioux Bluff, South Dakota.

* * * *

Sandra looked up from her desk and stopped breathing. James Makinen stood in the doorway. She stared frozen. The pounding of her heart grew louder

and louder until a final surge started her breathing again. She whispered, "Come in."

He moved into the chair across from her desk. With the insight she had from her last interview with him, she saw the lethal motions of a predator and not the shuffling of a middle-aged man.

After her second breath of air, she had recovered to the point she could ask questions. "Is there a reason you stopped by now? You were scheduled to come in next week."

"I know the one doing the killing is going to try to get Lori." When he saw Sandra about to speak, he stopped her with a shake of his head and continued. "I don't know how I know this but I do. I know that Kawalski or Shermon had to know something about the killings, so I had a little talk with them a couple of days ago. I pushed them hard. Kawalski was murdered that night. I am not going to let the killer make the next move. I need to find the killer but ... I ... don't ... know ... how?"

He looked at Sandra. She turned away. She wished she could think of him as an average middle-aged man. Every time she looked at him, she saw beyond the facade, a spark of light behind the eyes, a small gesture that hinted at enormous power held in check. With her eyes focused on the notes scattered across her desk, she said. "You do it the same way you handle all problems. You gather everything you know about the problem. You poke at it. You shift it. You sort it. When an idea comes out, you try it. If it works, fine. If it doesn't, you add it to what you know and start over again."

Sandra glanced up from her desk. Her eyes were caught in Makinen's stare. Unable to turn away, she heard him say. "I need to see the information you have. I need you to poke and prod." He held her eyes for a ten-second eternity and then looked away.

James left Sandra's office with barely more information than when he came. He never knew about the phone calls to the county and state attorneys. He never knew about the thinly veiled threat delivered to the school district's attorney, Jack Andrews, by Sandra. He never knew about the forces released by her prodding.

James walked the streets, trying to think. He wandered the blocks. He felt something important needed to work its way out of his mind. He used the physical exertion of his pounding steps to try to work it out. He stopped. His stomach growled from the scent of food drifting down the street. The sidewalk was filled with people drifting in and out of a corner church to their cars and back again. A basement window was open letting escape the aroma of a potluck meal and the sounds of dishes and voices.

Shermon! Shermon in church! His mother had told him after they had left the church so many days ago that Shermon was a deacon there. A deacon had to earn his post. Records were kept by churches. Records that could mean something!

Tom Peterson always took a few hours in the afternoon to sit and pray in the sanctuary. After his meditations he would feel strengthened, worthy of telling his flock God's word. He never understood why so many from his congregation never came back after that Sunday a few weeks ago. He took a few minutes every day to pray damnation on the two that started the exodus from the morning worship service, the evil Jezebel that started the walk out and the Ahab that followed after her. Tom had always loved the Old Testament. He understood and worshiped the power of absolute evil and the complete judgment of the ancient prophets. He prayed to God every day to give him a prophecy, a calling down of destruction. He wanted to experience the burning fire of God's wrath delivering destruction to sinners. He understood the pain felt by Jonah when after prophesying the destruction of Nineveh, they repented and God spared them. He needed to feel the power.

Tom knelt by the altar and prayed out loud God's wrath on Lori Waithe and James Makinen. Still enraptured in the ecstasy of prayer, Tom felt a force grab him and throw him against the wall. Tom laughed aloud. God had answered him! He was one of the prophets! He controlled the wrath of God on earth!

Tom opened his eyes. At first, they wouldn't focus. His breath had been taken away when the heavenly energy had thrown him against the wall. He smiled to himself. When his vision cleared, he would be looking at the face of God or one of his angels. He saw the face and tried to scream but not enough air had filled his lungs yet. Hands, filled with a force Tom had never experienced before, held him against the wall. The mouth on the face opened and through the enveloping blackness of shock Tom heard the words. "Fool! Trying to use God to fulfil your own petty desires. Well, learn about the real world!"

James looked at the unconscious preacher. The idiot had fainted. Something had snapped in him when he entered the church and heard the preacher praying for Lori's death. He was glad he had been able to stop before hurting the fool. James searched the preacher's pockets for his keys. He went to the office and unlocked the door. Another key fit the file cabinet. James had to admit the fool was organized. He found files on all the deacons and on Jefferson Shermon nearly immediately. There was a photocopier in the office, so he copied the information and put the files back.

When James got back to the preacher, he was curled on his side snoring. He slipped the keys back in his pocket and left. Back at Jeffrey Waithe's house, he started to call the churches that Shermon had previously gone to asking questions. As darkness fell, he left the papers and prowled the neighborhood.

* * * *

Click. _The silent darkened room echoes. Hands remove a card from the deck._

Upon a white horse rides a skeleton in black armor. His left hand holds a black banner with a white design in its center. His right hands hold the reins of his red eyed horse. The horse stands over a crowned body, preventing a holy man and two children from touching the corpse. Although the foreground of the card is bright, the sun is setting between two towers in the distance.

Click. _The card and the room plunge into blackness._

CHAPTER 16: Death

The first time Frank saw death on a person's face was when he was fifteen years old. His parents had left for a foreclosure auction in Sissiton. They had planned on staying overnight, spending one full day before the auction to examine the equipment for sale. It was twelve-thirty at night that the phone rang. Groggy from sleep, he had tried to answer it. None of the words said over the phone made any sense but finally he realized his sister needed help.

He drove his old rebuilt motorcycle to his sister's. When he got to her house, all the lights were on and the front door was open. Inside he saw his four-year-old nephew, JW, standing in his pj's with his eyes wide open and his thumb in his mouth. Frank asked his nephew where his mother was. He never answered but just stared with his wide-opened eyes.

He found Julie lying in her own blood on the living room floor next to the telephone. Her left eye had swollen shut. There was a deep matted depression on the side of her head. Small trickles of blood flowed from her eyes, ears, nose, and mouth. When her good eye focused on him, she started to talk. He bent down to hear her whispers and heard a terrible wheezing in her labored breath.

"Take care of JW, Frank." Frank looked up and saw JW still sucking his thumb watching from the hallway.

"I'll take care of JW, Julie. Right now we need to take care of you. Who did this?"

"Timothy," was the faint reply.

"Take it easy, Julie. I'll call for an ambulance." After making the phone call, Frank cradled her head in his lap. When he looked into her green eye, he saw death. He felt a rasp in her labored breathing. He found himself counting slowly to five between each painful inhale and exhale. Then the air went out of her body and everything stopped. He looked into her eye, it was

already starting to haze.

The ambulance crew and then the sheriff's deputies showed up. After Frank was questioned over and over, everyone became busy doing their jobs. Frank was pushed to the side of the room. He finally noticed, in the far doorway, JW standing with his thumb in his mouth. Before Frank could go to his nephew, he heard yelling from the front door.

Timothy, his brother-in-law, burst in drunk. He screamed for everyone to leave and yelled for his lazy no good bitch of a wife to get her ass in here. He started fighting with one of the deputies. Frank never saw how he did it but Timothy was suddenly waving the deputy's gun at everyone. There was a sharp noise and Timothy was on the floor.

Frank brought JW home with him as the morning sun started to rise in the east. His parents raised JW like he was his brother. Frank always tried to keep his promise to his sister but Frank never forgot how JW just looked on. Frank had thought something was different with JW before. After seeing him standing and watching the death of his parents, Frank was positive something wasn't quite right with his nephew's mind. JW would watch suffering with a detached cold-blooded pleasure that always drove the steel shards of the memories of the night Julie died into Frank's mind.

Although Frank had been Julie's younger brother, he always had to take care of her. She had been too trusting, too easily persuaded. He had been able to protect her all but two times. The one time before they left for Sioux Bluff and the night she died. The last time the deputy had done what he should have been able to, avenge her death, so Frank became a cop.

Frank could remember the faces of the thirteen other people he saw die in his life. Seven were accidents. Six were car crashes and one was a fall off the roof, which broke a neck. Three of the remaining six were heart attacks. The forth was a drug overdose. The last two deaths drove him from the streets and to his current job as a BCA agent.

It was midnight. He was a training officer for a young recruit. The rookie had only been on active duty with the force for twelve days. They got a silent alarm from a downtown drug store. When they pulled up, they found a stolen car had been driven through the front of the store and a number of figures running down a dark back alley. Frank yelled to the rookie to wait for backup and called in a report of the situation to the station. When Frank got out of the car, the rookie started running down the alley. Frank had nightmares of the run down the alley. Never able to catch up to his partner. Just seeing the flash of his outline race between the dark shadows. Past the corner of a building a flash and the echoing report of a shot came through the darkness. Tripping over the sprawled body of his partner, Frank smelled the blood and cordite. Before he could check his partner, the gun opened up again. Frank felt the whoosh of a bullet speed past his head and the warmth of his own pee running down his leg from the fear. He emptied his gun at the flashes. The silence was absolute.

When Frank's eyes adjusted again to the darkness after the bright flashes of gunfire, he saw his partner. His mouth would open with every gasp for air he made. The rookie's eyes caught the few rays of light in the dark alley. They luminesced with a fevered light. As Frank reached for him, he died.

Frank never knew how long he knelt next to his partner but finally a rustling made its way into his conscious. With numb fingers, he emptied the casings out of his revolver and loaded it with fresh bullets. Frank crept to the end of the alley. There the killer crawled, an empty gun by his side. The killer sensed he was not alone. He rolled to his side and looked up at Frank. Frank heard the twelve-year-old killer whimper, stick his thumb in his mouth, and die.

Frank shook the memories from his mind. He had an old nemesis to meet. Someone he could barely remember from his past long ago. Someone who had destroyed his sister, changed his life, and now threatened the existence of the only one he had pledged to protect. Frank got out of his car, walked to

the door and opened it. A blow hit him in the side. From the floor he looked up at the old man. In his hands, the killer had a twenty-two pistol with a plastic milk jug taped to its muzzle. Frank knew the combination made a perfect silent weapon. He felt the damage the bullet had done, tearing his insides apart. He felt death coming. He looked at the old man. "I should have killed you, Billy, years ago."

Frank's last conscious thought was that he had failed for a third time.

The old man was shaken. Who did he just kill? He had seen the car pull up in front of his house. He had recognized the man behind the wheel as one of the policemen that had come to the school. As he watched the cop stare out the windshield of his car, the old man got some duct tape, his twenty-two, and an empty milk jug. He was ready to kill the cop when he finally got out of his car. The old man had never been worried by the cop. He knew that the cop was trained to try to arrest a suspect before shooting. That's why people were so easy to kill. They always had to talk first.

But now the old man was worried. Somehow the cop had known him. The killer didn't like the idea of anyone knowing him. The old man got his Coleman cooler from the closet. Filling it with ice he went into the basement and loaded it with his trophies. He was about ready to leave when he glanced at the cop. Something bright showed from the dead man's mouth. The old man bent closer and saw that it was a gold tooth. The old man went to the closet. On a shelf in back, he found a claw hammer. Two blows with the hammer and the cop's jaw was broken. He reached into the mouth with the claw portion of the hammer. It took very little prying to pull the broken jaw from the dead man's flesh.

The old man giggled at the way the gold tooth contrasted with the piece of white jaw and the other remaining teeth. He whistled the theme from the Andy Griffith Show as he packed the jaw into the cooler. The old man loaded his pickup. He drove to an old abandoned barn at the edge of town. He got comfortable on the bench seat.

The old man looked at his cooler. He could sense the ice already melting in it. He would have to find a freezer soon or everything would spoil. He forced himself to sleep through the night. He needed the rest. He also knew he had his best ideas in the morning shortly after he woke. There was more killing to be done before he left town.

* * * *

Henry called the sheriff's department of Sioux Bluff, South Dakota. The current sheriff didn't recognize the names of Frank Jenson or Jefferson Shermon but he promised Henry to call him right back after he talked to his father. He assured Henry that his father had lived in Sioux Bluff his whole life and knew everything about everybody.

Henry tried to make the time pass quickly by reviewing the other records to find more links. Instead of accomplishing anything, he only succeeded in shuffling papers. It was nearly two-thirty in the morning before he got a phone call from Sioux Bluff. The sheriff had called in to his night deputy with the information from his father. He had the deputy look up the old records that his father had remembered. After locating the records, the deputy had called Henry.

Vernon had followed Henry back to his office. Henry asked him to go to the main office and pick up the faxes the deputy was sending while he made a call back to the sheriff. Vernon read the faxes as soon as the machine spit them out. By the second sheet of paper, Vernon called another BCA agent and sent him to Frank's room.

By five o'clock, the sheriff's station was filled with cops as the news spread that another officer had disappeared. Groggy from lack of sleep, Henry tried to coordinate the search for Frank and plan the questioning of JW Shermon.

* * * *

Chris had driven through the town of Deer Lake Falls three times before the sun started to rise. He was nervous and a little scared. He had only been a town cop for ten months. He had taken the job because he needed the health

insurance and the local union mills were not hiring. This killer had him scared spitless. He got queasy when he thought of what happened to Al. When he got off shift, he swore to himself that he would apply again at the union paper companies.

As the pink glow in the east faded into the long yellow shadows of early morning, the town woke up around his patrol car. Houses lit up and the streets started to empty as people left for work. Chris had not driven down every street but had stopped at the head of the occasional cul-de-sac to look down the side streets. The traffic slowed at seven forty as the first large group of commuters had already left for their eight o'clock jobs. As Chris pulled up to an intersection, he noticed a cul-de-sac empty of vehicles except for a nondescript tan car. Chris noted the state license plate. He pulled past the intersection and radioed in to the station that he had found Frank's car. Chris pulled his gun from his holster and prayed that backup would arrive before anything happened.

* * * *

The only reason Jacob McKinsie ran for county sheriff was that he wanted to be elected to the state senate. He knew that he was not a cop but a politician. He had let Henry Hakanen run the county's portion of the investigation, because he knew Henry was a good cop. He also knew that if anything went wrong, he had a readymade scapegoat. The phone call at four in the morning from the state headquarters of the BCA had threatened his plans. How could Henry let a BCA agent disappear? Jacob knew he had to fire Henry from the job but he had no idea who he could put in charge. He knew he wasn't able to do the job.

Jacob entered the sheriff's station and into a maelstrom of activity. The station had turned into a way station for the out-of-town cops working the case. Jacob vaguely remembered giving permission for the BCA agents and the state highway patrol to use half of his office space, but he had never realized how many people that would mean.

Jacob was only five feet, four inches. The average highway patrolman was six feet. A human barricade of waiting officers stopped him before the office area. From the other side of unwashed bodies, he heard Henry.

"I want you to quickly and quietly get Jefferson away from his surroundings and into the interrogation room. We need to find out what he told Frank. We get him on our turf. We give him no opportunity to get mad or oriented. We give him no reason to resist our questioning and no chance to organize any lies. Vernon will handle the interview. We need to have someone in authority that Jefferson is unfamiliar with. I don't want Jefferson to be left alone. If he goes to the bathroom, you go with him. Four of you will be going to his house. Two will go in and pick him up; the other two, Mike and John, will go in after he leaves for the station and talk to his wife.

"Now..."

"Sorry, Henry, but I think you need to take this call," interrupted Nancy. "Makinen is on line two."

"Hello, James, this is Henry ... What! ... How do you know ... Thanks."

In a loud voice, Henry shouted, "Who's got the information on Billy Jones?"

At nearly the same instant, another voice shouted, "We got Frank's car!"

The bodies moved, pinning Jacob's face into a smelly armpit. He tried to talk, tried to move. The mass of bodies surged around him. Suddenly the mass broke for the doors, carrying him with them. Outside, the gas fumes from the starting patrol cars settled into the same pocket that he retreated to. Jacob stood lost and alone, breathing the leftover fumes. Suddenly realizing who they were searching for, he took a breath and smelled death in the air. He left. He knew he had no business here. At his home, he called the BCA and in his most authoritative voice told the BCA "We are doing our job and we're doing it right. Back off! Or we'll just have to see which side the reporters will take."

Shaking, he poured himself a whiskey. He didn't know if he had done the right thing or not. He did know that he wasn't going to be out there with a killer on the loose. That is the job of a deputy, not the sheriff.

* * * *

James Makinen came in from his night watch. Unable to sleep, he started searching through the papers he got from the church. He found the church board's meeting notes. Every comment made by Shermon was studied. During the last year, the only comments Shermon made had to do with finances except for a recommendation that a wife's church membership be revoked for adultery. The year before that was the same, as well as the year before that and finally the year before that. On the second meeting after Shermon was elected a deacon, James finally found something. Shermon recommended a parishioner for membership. The parishioner, a William Jones, had moved from the town and church that Shermon had come from. The membership had been granted, although two other deacons had trouble remembering if Jones had ever attended a church service.

William Jones. William Jones. Why did the name sound so familiar? William, William, Will, Bill, Billy ... Billy! Billy Jones! The man who glared at him and then avoided his eyes when he confronted Kawalski and Shermon. The man, Jim remembered, who watched him from the shadows. Jim remembered watching the kids during breaks or hall duty and seeing the man with his faded blue uniform standing in the doorway or the side of the hall glaring back at him. James knew! James realized he had known all along who it was. He had just never wanted to believe it.

He picked up the phone. It was Henry's job to track the killer down. He was too tired. When he finished the call, he saw the others, Lori, Jeffrey, Marion, John, Ben, Bob and Betty.

Marion said, "Billy Jones. He was at the VFW right after you asked for help, Jeff."

"I always thought he was a little strange. But a killer?" Jeffrey replied.

Lori, her face focused on the past stated, "It's Jones."

The others nodded and drank more of their morning coffee.

* * * *

The table, the hands, the cards and the single light. The dark room is silent as the next card is turned over.

A lighted casement window with five yellow pentacles stands out on the bottom of the card. The scene is filled with snow. On the reversed card, a hunched man with a bell around his neck and a bandaged foot hobbles on homemade crutches behind a woman dressed in rags. Her head is bowed in the snow-filled night. Her bare feet leave meager prints in the fresh snow.

The still room asks the question the card presents.

CHAPTER 17: The Five of Pentacles reversed

Nicole had always been a bitch. Although her parents were well off, she had not been spoiled by money and toys but by the absolute belief in her words by her parents. The first time she realized she had power over her parents was when she got in a fight with another girl in pre-school. Suzy was playing with a doll that she wanted. When she told her she wanted the doll, Suzy refused to stop playing with it. Nicole pulled the doll from Suzy's arms and raked her fingernails across her face. Nicole laughed at the sight of blood on Suzy's face, even when the jolt of pain from Suzy hitting her in the nose radiated through her head. When her mother picked her up from school that day, she complained how Suzy hurt her. Her mother held her so close to her breast that her bruised nose started to throb. Nicole's mother promised to take care of everything, and by the next week, Suzy was not in class.

The next time Nicole remembered using her control over her parents was in second grade. The teacher had been hired fresh from college. She was tough and wouldn't let Nicole get away with anything. Nicole came home every night for a month complaining how her teacher hated her. Nicole was transferred to

another class and her parents hounded the teacher until she left the school at the end of the year.

By the time Nicole was fourteen, she had her parents totally deceived and in her control. She was the envy of every girl in school. She went to any concert or game she wanted to. She would stay out late at night, even during the school week. She wore the latest style hair and clothes. All the boys wanted her. Of course, she didn't want them. They were too immature!

In late spring that year, she heard about a keg party at a lake that the high school jocks were holding to celebrate the end of the school year. She had to go. She told her parents that she was staying with a girl friend for the weekend. She packed a backpack with her clothes and make-up. A quick discussion with her parents and they drove her out to a lake cabin that she claimed belonged to her friend's family but was only a half mile from the party.

After her father dropped her off at the supposed lake cabin of her friend, she walked down the road until she found an empty cottage. With a rock, she broke a window and climbed in. Inside she applied her make-up and dressed in a tight set of jeans, a satin blouse, and doused herself with some fifty dollar an ounce French perfume she'd stolen from her mother. It was still a quarter-mile walk to the site of the party. It was completely dark by the time she got there.

Nicole savored the sights and sounds of her first unchaperoned teenage party. The music from a tricked out car stereo echoed down the road for most of her quarter-mile walk. As she got within a few hundred feet of the party, tendrils of bonfire smoke hung over cars parked along both sides of the road. Soon a scattering of partygoers surrounded her. Couples were laughing and talking. Some couples made out by the sides of the cars or in the nearby woods. A few cars moved up and down, seemingly of their own accord. A figure shrouded by the dark was throwing up his last beer and another closer to the bonfire urinated noisily against some bushes. As she entered the circle of light, a beer was handed to her and she started to drink.

Nicole was spotted by a group of boys waiting off to the side. The group had prowled the keg parties for the last year, challenging themselves with wilder and wilder sexual exploits. A boy from the group soon had her drinking her second beer. Before the hour was up, three boys from the group led the staggering Nicole back into the woods where they had a van parked. The boys then took turns fucking her.

Nicole was mostly unconscious by the time she got to the van. She was grateful to lie down. She barely noticed the first boy on her but somehow the primitive movement between her legs registered in her mind. She raised her legs and tried to move back in rhythm but failed. Every time a new body shoved itself between her legs her body tried to react until it was Dean's turn.

Dean saw the sloppy mess between her legs and belched, "Can't any of you fucking idiots clean up after yourselves? Somebody get me a God damn beer!"

Dean took the beer. Shook it. Stuck the foaming bottle up Nicole's vagina. As the beer washed away the sticky mass between her legs, Nicole tried to scream from the pain of the alcohol burning her raw abused tissues. All Nicole was able to do was a few sharp inhales of breath. A rough towel was used to wipe the last remaining drops of residue from between her legs. Nicole nearly made it back to full consciousness but then Dean entered her inflamed vagina. Beyond all reason, the tortured tissue delivered to Nicole her first orgasm. It would be her only clear memory of the night since drinking her first beer.

The next day Nicole awoke in the back of a pickup belonging to an old man living halfway between the lake and town. She had been dumped there by the boys. She talked the old man into letting her clean up in his house before driving her into town. A little fast talk to her parents and they never suspected anything unusual ever happened that weekend. But she was scared and sore.

Afraid to tell her mother about what had happened, she treated her inflamed tissues herself. She soaked for hours in the bathtub. She used various salves. Finally, later in the week when the healing of the flesh caused itching, she started to rub herself with a powerful antibiotic salve. The itching, the burning pain and the rubbing combined to give her a second, a third and a fourth orgasm. In her mind, the need to hurt to produce pleasure had been forged. She became an expert in both pleasure and pain. She loved to give it as well as receive. She would seduce younger boys in school, make them whimper in pain, and watch their faces when she left them for someone else.

Her sadistic swath of sexual conquests continued until her senior year in college when she met Jeff. He was more than a match for her. She decided to marry him the night they destroyed his ex-girlfriend.

Jeff left his apartment to pick up his ex-girlfriend on the pretext of getting back together. Nicole waited in his closet naked except for a dog choke collar around her neck and a small whip in her hands. Jeff brought his old girlfriend back to the apartment. A little wine and a little smooth talk and she was in bed with him. In the closet, Nicole used the whip on herself while Jeff slowly seduced the girl. He had regularly tied her to the bed before so the girl let herself be bound again. After she was strapped down, Nicole came out from hiding. Together they abused the girl through the night.

Later in the week the girl killed herself. That summer, Nicole and Jeff married. Nicole loved her marriage. Both shared their pleasure and pain with each other and the occasional innocent they caught. That was until a year or two ago. Jeff became a little bored with his job and it showed up in their bed. Nicole had been ready to leave him until just a few weeks ago when he came back from work rejuvenated. His thirst for pain and pleasure was unquenchable. Nicole planned to bring home a young girlfriend for them to enjoy, but everything started to fall apart. The murders and the investigation shook Jeff's assurance in himself. Nicole again planned to leave.

Last night, Jeff's uncle showed up. In amazement, she heard him confess everything to him. After his uncle left, he paced through the night. Nicole fingered herself while she watched her husband's strength crumble before her eyes. He was completely broken by the time the cops arrived for him that morning.

After Jeff left with the cops, Nicole started to pack. She had barely started when the doorbell rang. Two more cops wanted to talk to her about her husband. One was good looking. The other was ugly. Nicole knew she looked good to men. She paced the room in apparent nervousness in such a way as to accent her curves and sex. When she was sure they both were looking at what she was showing, she walked up to the ugly one and told them everything about her husband. She held the ugly cop's hands while she talked so he couldn't get away. As Nicole talked, she shifted her weight from foot to foot. From the corner of her eye, she watched a bead of sweat form on the ugly man's face as she brushed the inside of her thigh and the tip of her breasts against him. At the same time, she maintained a direct eye contact with the good-looking cop.

After the cops left, Nicole added to her bags the handcuffs she stole from the ugly man. In a slight way, Nicole wanted to stay; both cops showed some potential for fun. Instead, she finished packing. At Jeff's bank, she withdrew all of their money and from the safety deposit box, she took everything but Jeff's birth certificate. She left the bank and drove south.

* * * *

Shermon was dazed as he walked from the police car to his house. He entered the cold empty house. Frank was gone. His uncle was the only person in his life that he ever depended on. When his mother had been killed by her husband those many years ago, he had not felt fear or anger. He had felt a loss. Who would take care of him? Who would make his meals? Who would make sure his clothes were clean? For some reason, the loss of Frank was even worse than the loss of his mother. Back then, Frank had been there when his mother died. Now there was no one. No one!

Where was Nicole? He checked the house. Her things were gone. Outside,

her car was gone. She wouldn't leave him. She couldn't without money! He checked his watch. He could just make it to the bank before closing.

They had already transferred most of their ready cash into Nicole's account to protect it from a possible seizure by the lawyers of the teachers or the school board. The bank accounts had been emptied. Most of their remaining assets had been in bonds and certificates in their safety deposit box. They had been planning on a quick getaway and had consolidated everything for easy transfer. The only thing remaining in the box was his birth certificate. He read again the words on the document. Jefferson William Jenson ... born 8 lbs. 5 oz.... mother Julie Lynn Jenson ... father William Joseph Jones...

Shermon screamed. He threw the empty box against the wall of the bank cubicle. He sat, ranting, on the floor meticulously shredding his birth certificate. That was how the bank security guard found him.

* * * *

Henry sat in his living room easy chair. The sun was setting through the window. The blood red glow darkened the silent room. Frank, Al, Pike, Jenny, Kawalski, Frank, Al, Pike, Jenny ... They had missed the killer. Would they get Billy before another was added to the list? Frank, Al, Pike, Jenny, Kawalski. Henry closed his eyes trying to erase the sight of Frank's mutilated body, the way his face collapsed in without a jaw. The setting sun came out from behind a tree and a shaft of light hit the lids of Henry's closed eyes turning everything blood red. In complete exhaustion, Henry fell asleep to the encompassing red glow.

* * * *

The hands turn over a card.

A naked woman kneels, pouring water from two earthen jars. Her right hand pours the water into a pond while her left pours the water onto the ground. Seven white stars fill the sky of the upside down card. In the center of the card's blue sky is a large eight-pointed yellow star.

Darkness engulfs the hushed room. The only sound, muted steps leaving.

CHAPTER 18: The Star reversed

Makinen woke with a start. He had started the night watch as usual but the tension of the previous nights was gone. Everyone knew that Jones had to be hiding. At three, James had come in for a cup of coffee. After drinking half the cup, he had slowly collapsed in stages while sitting on the couch. It took ten minutes from when his eyes first closed until he completed laying in a fetal position on the sofa. Jeffrey placed a blanket over James. He and the rest of the VFW gang finished off the watch.

Lori's lips changed from a slight pucker to a grin as she backed away from the startled sleeper. She saw Jim's innocent aspect as he slept and had to bend down to kiss his cheek. The startled man and smiling girl looked at each other, enjoying the momentary intimacy. Their smiles changed to worry as they remembered what was happening to them. What would happen next? Where was Billy Jones?

* * * *

Henry woke in his easy chair to the red glow of the morning sun. He moved his tired body in stages. Each limb woke in its own time and way. His left leg woke to an ache from a break when he was twelve. His knees crackled and popped as the arthritic joints moved. The back straightened in sequence as each vertebra fought to align with its neighbors. A good five minutes after his eyes opened, he hobbled his aged, crippled body into the kitchen to brew a cup of coffee.

As the aroma of brewing coffee filled the kitchen, Henry fought his boiling anger at the gruesome deaths of his friends and tried to probe for the next actions of Billy Jones.

By the time Henry stepped behind his office desk, he was coolly and calmly in control. It was the aloof control most people associate with

Scandinavians. People living in the far North all seem to have a reserve, a control foreign to the passions of the people of the warmer climates. The control is mistaken as a lack of feelings. The harsh endless cold of northern winters is unforgiving of any mistakes made in passion. The survivors learned to control their emotions. But the emotions are only controlled. Nature knew that in times of distress, passion and emotion could mean survival. The rest of the world only vaguely remembers the passion of the Northern Peoples in the form of a few words and stories left over from the time when the Vikings swept through Europe, North Africa, and Eastern Asia. Now their descendants waited and studied as their passions grew, waiting for the time of release.

At his desk, Henry studied the accumulated paperwork. The tox screens and final forensic reports were in from Billy's first victims. Henry found no new useful information there. He did find some grim pleasure when he read the revised FBI psychological report. He easily found the patchwork phrasing and sentences the behavioral psychologists used to repair their original report to match Billy Jones's profile. The one thing that caught his eye was the statement that Billy would run and hide. He would only start his killing again after he established his life in another location.

When Henry saw in technical gobbledygook those words, he knew they were wrong. Billy had moved here because of his family. Jefferson was his son. He had murdered for pleasure but also for some warped sense of family. Jefferson had said that Jenny resembled his mother when she was Jenny's age. He had killed all the others except Al for some obscure family-related reason. Pike was Jenny's pimp. Kawalski was a partner with his son. Frank was Billy's brother-in-law. Al had been in the way. In the way? In the way of what? Did Al see something? Was he in the wrong place? Where was Al before he disappeared? The school parking lot. Who or what was in the parking lot at the time Al was murdered? What was Billy doing? Henry somehow knew Billy wouldn't leave until his son was gone. Henry knew the psychologists were wrong again. Billy wasn't finished here.

Henry reviewed the trophies, the missing body parts, trying to find a link there. He sent police to every place Billy was known to frequent to interview everyone he had talked to. By the end of the day, the Governor had pulled the highway patrol out of the investigation. The neighboring counties had also claimed their deputies. They all thought Billy Jones had left the area. The station almost felt deserted after the bustle of the last few days. All that were left were a few BCA agents, the county deputies, and the local town police.

Henry talked to Vernon and all the others left on the task force before the end of the day. He told them that no matter what anyone else said, Billy Jones was still out there. Frank Jenson and Al Gallea had been killed when they confronted Billy alone. No one was to go after Billy without backup.

It was six o'clock and there was one final name on the list of Billy Jones' acquaintances to be interviewed, Pastor Tom Peterson. Vernon was processing paperwork at a desk down the hall and Nancy was still at dispatch. Henry told them both where he was going and to contact him immediately if anything happened.

Peterson's wife answered the door.

"Hello. Mrs. Peterson?" A small nod was the reply. "I'm Deputy Sheriff Henry Hakanen. My office called earlier about asking your husband some questions ... about one of his parishioners."

In a small voice, the woman replied, "Oh, yes. I remember the call. My husband has not been feeling well. Do you have to talk to him?"

"I'm sorry, but it is very important that I speak to him."

She paused to think and with a slight nod she said, "He's in his office. I'll take you there." She turned and walked to the back of the house. Without looking to see if Henry was following, she continued. "He's not been feeling well. I've talked to the district office. Reverend Sharpton talked to Tom yesterday. The district is making arrangements for Tom to visit a retreat in Arizona for a few months. We'll be leaving before the end of the week."

By the time she finished her ramblings, they were standing at a closed door. She looked up at Henry then knocked on the door. "Honey, Deputy Hakanen has stopped by to talk to you." She turned to Henry and whispered, "Go on in. I'll wait for you in the living room."

Henry entered the darkened room. A small desk lamp at the table was the only illumination. Henry stood in the doorway waiting for his eyesight to adjust to the dark. A voice from a chair in the corner rambled in a strange cadence.

"Mr. Peterson." After a pause Henry repeated in a slightly louder voice, "Mr. Peterson."

"Who is that? Did God send you? Have you come to bring judgment on those sinners, Lori Waithe and James Makinen?"

"I've come to ask you about one of you parishioners, William Jones."

"Who?"

"William possibly Billy Jones."

"Oh, yes, Billy Jones, a true man of God. Deacon Shermon told me how strong a Christian brother Jones is. You know, he tithes every paycheck. I stopped by his home once. He had his bible in the living room. We talked and prayed. He fixed us this beautiful little lunch. We talked about God's wrath and the coming tribulation. It was joyous ... What was it you wanted to talk about?"

"I would like to find out more about what Billy Jones said to you."

"Oh, yes. Billy Jones, a wonderful man of God. Did you know I felt the hand of God touch me when I prayed for damnation on those sinners, Makinen and Waithe?"

"We were talking about Billy Jones."

"I felt God's hand touch me. The power threw me across the sanctuary. I woke with the red vision of God's judgment in my eyes. Hallelujah! Praise Jesus! Thank you, Lord, for your blessed vision! Would you bow your head in prayer with me? Thank you, Lord ... Thank you, Jesus..."

Henry looked at the kneeling man and backed out of the darkened room. In the living room, Henry asked his wife, "What happened to him?"

"It started when the congregation walked out on him during his Sunday sermon some weeks ago. Then a few days ago, he came back from praying at the church with a dazed look on his face. He's been talking about God's judgment since then. He's spent most of the last two days shut up in his office. He won't come out and he won't let me turn on the lights or open the curtains. He just sits in there praying for judgment and damnation." She then quietly started to sob. Quick intakes of breath were followed by a nearly inaudible moan.

Henry touched her shaking shoulders whispering, "I'm sorry. Would you want me to call someone for you?"

The penitent head shook 'no.' Henry let his hands rest on her shoulders for a minute, then left the stricken home.

* * * *

The room seems to be bathed in greater darkness when the lamp turns on. The single spot of illumination fails to hold the blackness at bay. Mysterious shadows from the light accent the tendons and veins of the hands, making them into talons that scratch at the deck of cards, turning over the next.

On the foreground of the card, a man and a woman are chained. A large figure is perched on the post they are bound to. Curling goat horns come from the large figure's head and bat wings sprout from his back. A pentagram is etched on the creature's forehead. His right hand is raised in greeting and his left hand carries a lighted torch. A closer look at the two in front discerns that a set of horns issue from their red hair and tails come from behind their backs.

CHAPTER 19: The Devil

Billy slowly rocked back and forth in the chair and waited. He felt a

slight breeze from the window he had forced open in the back of the apartment. He liked this room. It had the close, dark feel of an animal's den. His left hand went into his pants pocket and pulled out the small piece of jaw. He caressed the bone lovingly. Finally, he put the trophy back and removed his keys from his other pocket. He jingled the keys in time with his rocking but finally his playful hands reached for his talisman at the end of the key chain. There the hands stroked the polished white three-inch long piece of bone. When questioned by his drinking buddies, he told them it was a portion of rib bone from the first deer he had ever shot. He rubbed the bone against his cheek and lips remembering when he first got it.

It was after he killed the driver of the wrecked car. An uneasiness came over him. He couldn't sleep. He didn't eat. Finally, he loaded a case of beer in his pickup and drove. He found himself in Sioux Bluff. He had always known where Julie had died. This was the first time he had an urge to see her grave. He drove to the cemetery. There he walked past the stones, reading the names, one by one. Then he saw it, Julie Jenson Shermon. He sat by the graveside through the afternoon drinking beer.

A man drove up with a backhoe. He dug a grave at the far corner of the cemetery. Another man arrived in a pickup. Together the two men spread green astro turf over the mound of fresh dirt. They pulled the backhoe to a small shed at the back of the cemetery and left in the pickup as the sun went down past the far hills.

Billy drank two more beers as night brought silence to the small town. The craving came over him to see Julie again. Billy staggered to the backhoe. The keys were gone but he had hot wired tractors before. He jolted his way through the cemetery, missing most of the large headstones, rolling over the smaller ones. He tore a small pinhole in the hydraulic line crossing over a headstone. A thin spray of oil came from the hose every time he used the hydraulics. The oil landed on the hot manifold of the tractor, filling the still air with fumes. Within a half-hour after getting to Julie's grave, the shovel on the backhoe bit through the rotted wood on her coffin. Going back to his pickup for a lantern and a beer, he sat for hours on the edge of her broken coffin, his feet resting on her corpse. The weak light of the lantern flickered across her rotted flesh, making the corpse seem to breathe.

Billy talked to her about what he had done over the years. Then told her how he had killed the man in the car. Finally he relived with her the moments when he became a man in his own mind, his raping of her. As he talked, he became hard with lust. His anger flared as he watched the rotted corpse seem to move in the flickering light. He wanted her but couldn't consummate the act with the corpse.

Billy flexed his hands, wishing he had been the one to kill her, to break her flesh, to see the terror in her eyes. He stood up and staggered. His feet had slipped through Julie's rotted flesh and to the bottom of the coffin. The body seemed to fold in about his feet trapping him. In panic, he reached down and pulled her ribs apart with his fists. His feet free, he climbed out of her coffin. Safe, he looked down on her corpse. The frenzy and the beer had worked on Billy's bladder. He opened his fly and pointed the yellow stream across Julie's face in retaliation. The weak lantern light and the haze from the yellow spray changed the features of the rotted corpse to someone living. To Billy's beer soaked mind the face behind the haze became a young girl, a young girl with large boobs. A girl he had raped before. A girl he would fuck again. Only this time, the girl had a different name, Jenny.

On a quest, Billy climbed out of the hole, his hand clutching at the earth. Pulling himself up, he found he had a stick in his hand, only it didn't feel right. He brought it to his truck. In the cab light he saw it was part of a rib. He pulled the rotted flesh and cloth away until the white bone gleamed in the light. Billy placed the bone in the middle of the seat. This would be his talisman on his quest. The quest to completely possess Julie/Jenny again. He had to get complete and total control of her again and this time he would decide on how it would end.

Starting the tractor, he filled in the grave. He backed the tractor up and headed back to where he had taken it. In the tractor's headlight, he saw another stone. He raked the teeth on the backhoe's shovel across the stone, putting three large gouges through the name Shermon. He left the backhoe there. Its shovel buried deep into the grave, the ground soaked with oil from a busted hydraulic line.

The next day, the local police released a report that drunken vandals, probably kids, had hot-wired a tractor and damaged some headstones at the cemetery. The police refused to believe what they found. It had to have been kids, anything else was too sick.

Billy polished his talisman until it gleamed white. In a supply closet at the back of the school building, he would drink beer and rub his talisman against his body. He was there when he overheard Kawalski talking to Pike.

"You know, Pike, we have a lot of old-time teachers in this school. First-year teachers are easier to control. They also miss more of what is happening around them. Don't you think it would be much easier if one of those teachers who always seems to be around checking on things was replaced by someone new?"

"Sure would. Who do you want me to get this time?"

"We can't do the fall down the stairs again this year and we can't set someone up with drugs, cause they just might check up on the whole school. Now, Makinen has been divorced for a few years. He's not dating anyone. Everyone would believe he fooled around with a high school girl. Do you think you could handle it?"

"Easy. You'll get what you want but it's going to cost you..."

Billy never caught the rest of the conversation that day but the next day, he saw Pike talking to Jenny. He saw Pike and Jenny watch Makinen while they talked. Their smiles and laughter told him what they were planning. The following day, he watched Makinen lust after Jenny from the balcony. Makinen's name was added to his list.

Billy had to kill Makinen. He had to kill Lori. How dare Makinen change his mind, ignoring the beautiful Jenny to go after that skinny bitch, Lori? How could that small-breasted little bitch be more alluring to Makinen than Jenny? They both had to die in pain. If he could get them together, he could ... The talisman wasn't enough anymore. He reached into his pants. He masturbated in time to his rocking, until his white semen stained the white bone.

* * * *

The day started for Henry with a sticky stillness. Nature as well as man seemed to sense something was going to happen. At the station, everyone was jumpy. Vernon and the other BCA agents had been told to wrap up the investigation. They were needed in Minneapolis. No one wanted to leave. Everyone did their job as slowly as possible.

In a fog caused by lack of sleep and worry, Henry sat at his desk. He tried to fill out overtime forms and other backlogged paperwork. Instead of reading and filling in blanks, he found himself staring at the walls. _Where will Billy show up next?_

James, Lori, and Jeffrey spent the day trying to decide what to do next. The VFW boys had gone to their homes for some rest now that Billy had disappeared. Lori wanted to go back to her apartment. James argued against it not want her to be alone. His fear communicated itself to her father. Finally by the end of the day, they convinced Lori to stay through the week. Lori couldn't stand the troubled look on her father's face.

* * * *

Click. _In the silent darkened room, the hands reach for the card._

A horse charges across the card. His armored rider's sword is raised in challenge.

The hands hold no hesitation when they turn off the light. The footsteps leaving the room are swift and sure. For one brief second, a silhouette is seen in the doorway leaving the room.

CHAPTER 20: The Knight of Swords

James woke refreshed. It had been another quiet night. There was a feeling of safety with the VFW boys still keeping watch at night and the killer, Billy, being on the run. James's mind was actually clear. He saw Lori walk into the living room. He was still using the couch for his naps between his perimeter prowls. For possibly the first time, he saw her in complete clarity. She was not beautiful, but in the morning light she was so pretty it hurt. The precise delicate features, the curls of hair framing the face, the slight squint of the eyes from behind her glasses to the following shadow of a smile on her lips seared his mind with their intensity. In his mind, she didn't walk across the room but flowed in an undulating rhythm. His clarity of vision was lost as his eyes filled with moisture.

"Good morning. Did you sleep well?" Her hands brushed his cheek. She smiled.

Paralyzed with the intensity of emotions, James sat there unmoving.

Her hand tousled the hair on his head. Smiling she said, "Breakfast."

James watched her turn to leave. As he marveled at how she moved, his mind locked in to the last time he sat watching the sway of her body as it walked away. The cold anger of the preacher's sermon and the pride in Lori's dignity and strength washed through his paralysis. He got up to eat.

During the meal, he watched her eat. He never knew what he consumed but knew about each and every bite of toast, eggs and drink of milk that went past her lips. He never realized how intensely he was watching her until the laughter from her father across the table and the resulting red flush that traveled from Lori's cheek to the curve of her jaw.

Jeffrey wistfully said, "I remembered looking at your mother the same way ... Lori you have a big decision you need to make. This man loves you.

"Jim, you better not ever hurt her..."

Jeffrey left the table with tears in his eyes.

Lori opened her mouth to say something and then closed it. She opened it again and closed. She sputtered. "I can't talk here. I need fresh clothes from my apartment if I'm going to stay here another week. Come along and we'll talk."

Lori yelled as they left the house, "Dad, I'm going to my apartment for clothes. Be back in an hour or so."

On the drive down, neither spoke. Although both had left the house to talk, neither could start. At the apartment, James followed behind Lori. He was still enthralled with her movement.

* * * *

Henry woke to the day confused. What would the killer, Billy, do next? That was the trouble with serial killers. They were not quite sane.

When Henry was little, he remembered hunting with his father. His father always said, "Think like what you're hunting. If you're hunting a deer, be a deer. What would you like to eat? Where is a good place to sleep? How would you travel between..."

Henry had used that technique many times before. A young child lost in the woods, a drunk trying to hide after a car wreck, a series of burglaries at some lake cabins, it had always worked. But how do you understand insanity without becoming insane yourself? Insane. Insane! Tom Peterson! Tom Peterson was insane. Lori Waithe and James Makinen were the rocks that Tom dashed his soul upon in his single-minded attempt to destroy them. They had not been phased by his assault. Their indifference had hurt him even more than his failure to harm them. He still wanted to see them destroyed.

The killer had wanted to destroy them as well. He had failed. It would burn in him. He would try again.

Henry called. "Hi, Mr. Waithe. I would like to talk to your daughter or James ... Not there now ... Uhh huh. When will they be back? No, no, nothing wrong ... Just need to talk to them ... Her apartment ... Thank you ... talk to you later."

For the first time in days, Henry felt he had a handle on the situation. He hummed while he drove.

* * * *

Billy had been rocking in the same chair for three days. The back corner of the room where he sat had the stale musty smell of a confined animal. Every time he returned to the corner after eating or going to the bathroom, he would inhale deeply the smell. He would imagine that a component of the smell was the decaying flesh of the jawbone that he carried. Frank's jaw had become his second most important trophy, after the portion of Julie's rib.

His pickup was hidden in the woods a quarter mile from where he was now waiting. In order to preserve his other trophies, he had carried his twenty-quart cooler through the thick scrub brush surrounding the town to the apartment. By the time he had placed his prizes in the refrigerator, he was covered with scratches and little flakes of blood. The sting of sweat dripping into his open cuts was a delicious inducement for his plans. Unlike what had happened to Pike, he hoped that the next victim would be lucid during his death.

A car finally pulled up to his ambush site. From his vantage point in the corner of the room, he was able to see who it was. He picked up an axe he had placed next to the chair and stood silently in the shadows of the room. The key rattled the door. Steps traveled across the room. Finally, they saw each other.

Billy was filthy, unshaven, smelly, and standing in the shadows with an upraised axe. There should have been terror, screams or escape coming from the victim. Instead, calm eyes dissected his appearance and a soft voice said, "James, Billy finally showed up."

The calm eyes filled his vision. For the first time since his father's beatings, Billy felt physical terror. The eyes moved aside replaced by an even more assured pair. Billy had trouble catching his breath. With a scream of anguish he attacked, swinging his axe.

Beyond all reason the calm eyes locked on his. Somehow the swinging axe stopped its forward motion. Numbness traveled down his arm. Billy heard the axe rattle to the floor. He stepped forward and a powerful blow threw him into the wall. He tried another swing with his fist and found himself on the floor.

He looked up and saw the two sets of calm eyes watching him. He felt the broken jaw bone gouging his leg where he fell on it. He felt for the rib. He got up from the floor, clutching his talisman. With all of his strength, he tried to move against those eyes. Instead he whirled, diving through the window. Landing in a heap in the postage stamp sized front lawn he picked himself up. Looking through the broken window, he found the eyes still watching him. With a scream, he turned to run.

Deputy Sheriff Henry Hakanen was standing there. His gun was out, pointed directly at his head. Billy wanted to turn but he felt those eyes watching. With another scream, he lunged at Henry. Billy watched the flash of light come from the muzzle of the gun. He felt a blow, then his face was on the ground. Grass stubble scratched his face. His ears rang from the explosion. As darkness came, he finally lost the sense of being watched by those eyes but then other eyes started to examine him, Julie, the unknown driver, Jenny, the cop ... He tried to escape in the blackness but the eyes followed.

Henry was shaken. He had never before killed a man. What the hell happened? Billy had been crazed with fear. He looked up at the apartment and saw James and Lori. He saw the two touch hands, love. He felt good watching them but his eyes then turned to the body at his feet. What had happened?

Henry called for backup. When the deputies started to arrive, he went inside to interview James and Lori. He tried to do a thorough interview, but the two kept sneaking looks at each other. Henry felt like a voyeur. Finally, he called Jeffrey to come and take them home.

James sat on the Waithe's couch. Its softness encased him like an old

friend. He had stumbled into the home barely able to keep his feet under him. The energy surge that had coursed through his body during the confrontation with Billy had finally subsided. His muscles felt weak and rubbery. He must have been hyperventilating because he felt his balance go with every deep breath.

He heard in the background Lori and her father talking but didn't have the presence of mind to understand their conversation. His mind continually played back the confrontation with Billy.

He followed Lori into her apartment, watching the sway of her body. He knew something was wrong when she stopped. He saw her muscles tense through her clothes. Her voice telling him that Billy was there was anticlimactic.

He stepped forward. He saw his left hand in slow motion brush Lori's shoulder and move her aside. There was no fear but just emptiness as the wild-eyed Billy attacked. He stepped inside Billy's swing, blocking it with a speed block against the nerve center in the forearm. The axe went flying, with Billy staggering backwards. Billy lunged again and this time James delivered a snap kick to the chest. Billy bounced away from the blow and was flattened into the wall. During the replay of what had happened, Jim realized that he couldn't remember any sound of the struggle, no clanging of the axe on the floor, no gasping for air. The eerie silence brought back the memory of each move and countermove with a surreal clarity.

Billy's mouth opened in some unknown utterance and he lunged again. This time James caught his outstretched arm with his left hand. He pivoted on his center of gravity, bringing his right hand behind Billy's back. The Aikido throw was perfectly timed and Billy flew into the far wall and slid to the floor. For the first time since Billy started his attack, Jim saw Lori. He stepped to her, brushing her hand with his fingertips. They watched Billy struggle to rise. When he finally got to his feet, Billy's crazed looks had changed to fear. He jumped through the window.

Jim and Lori held hands as Billy turned to attack Henry. The sound of Henry's gunshot broke the silence of Jim's recall. He saw again the hair fly up as the bullet passed through Billy's head. His hand tightened its grip on the couch's armrest. In slow steps, Jim relaxed his grip finger by finger. He rubbed the feeling back into his cramped fingers as he relived the last few twitches of Billy's dying body.

And then the scene played back again, and again, and again...

Jim finally forgot when he felt his head being eased upon a soft shoulder by gentle hands.

* * * *

The solitary light eases back the darkness. The hands silently turn over a card.

A dark-cloaked man stands, head bowed. At his feet, three cups are spilled. Behind him are two cups still standing. In front of the man is a small stream. There is a bridge with a small keep on the other side.

CHAPTER 21: The Five of Cups

Shermon packed up his new used car. A quick stop followed at the office of Jack Andrews, the school board's attorney, for his severance check. He thought the term severance was a joke. Why didn't everyone use the term for what it was, blackmail? It was common practice to give a principal or superintendent a large check when they were fired. He never understood why the public never complained about the cost. Shermon knew he had to leave before the police found enough evidence for an indictment on embezzlement. With Kawalski dead, he would skate free on the other charges.

He had very little bargaining pressure with the school board. He had started by asking for one hundred thousand dollars. Andrews countered with twenty-five thousand. Shermon then came back with the statement that both Andrews and the school board should have known about the loss of funds. After all, they signed all the necessary papers. Andrews then came up with the offer of fifty thousand.

Shermon thought for a while that he might have to settle for that when he remembered that Amy, Kawalski's secretary, had also signed all the paperwork. After reminding Andrews about the readymade scapegoat they had in Amy, he agreed to seventy-five thousand.

Shermon had insisted on a cashier's check for the money. He would drive out of state before cashing the check. He decided on South Dakota. The state had weak banking laws and a couple of the banks there were trying to get into interstate banking. Shermon knew he could use the bank to hide most of the money and keep only enough cash to let him disappear. Maybe, he should use a few thousand to hire a detective to try to find Nicole. She did have most of his savings, besides he wanted to see her one last time. She needed to be punished for running out on him. He knew exactly how he would punish her.

* * * *

Andrews was having a busy day. First that dirty little business with that scum, Shermon, in the morning and then the bulldog of a union lawyer at one o'clock in the afternoon. He relished the idea of screwing her, that uppity little bitch. She would have no idea that with Shermon safely out of state and Kawalski dead, they could ride out any suit brought against the board. To make sure she realized how weak her case had become, he would start by firing Lori Waithe. After all, there had to be something wrong with her character in order for a serial killer to mark her for death.

Andrew thought he was destroying Sandra until an hour into the meeting. That was when Wayne Johnson showed up, apologizing for being late.

"My wife, Vera, still isn't feeling too well after finding that body."

"Wayne, what are you doing here?"

"Didn't Ms. Thomas tell you? Our CPA firm has been retained by both the teacher's union and the State of Minnesota to run a complete audit of the school's finances. Would you believe it, Jack? The Attorney General himself called to make sure we started the audit right away!"

When Andrews looked again at Sandra, he expected to see a smile. Instead, all he saw was a grim face.

"Mr. Andrews, I think you will be busy for some time with Mr. Johnson. Why don't you call me tomorrow? And this time, you and the school board had better be a little more reasonable. After all, I'm just getting started working on this case. I would hate to be forced to stay up here away from my husband and kids for too long. I get a little cranky being away from my family for too extensive a period of time." She then leaned closer whispering, "Don't tell anyone, but my husband says I get down right bitchy if I'm gone for more than two weeks." In even a softer voice she continued, "Tomorrow it will be thirteen days since I've seen my family. Are you at all superstitious?"

This time she smiled and in a louder voice said, "I've got to leave now and call my husband. I usually try to call twice a day. Mr. Johnson, I'll be expecting a preliminary report before the end of the month. When I talked to the Attorney General yesterday, we both thought that would be a reasonable time frame.

"Good day."

* * * *

The two men from the district office pulled in at midmorning. They helped Mrs. Peterson load the back of the van with the family's personal belongings. At noon they were ready to leave for the Arizona retreat. Tom Peterson was still shut up in his back office. Mrs. Peterson knocked on the door.

"Honey? You remember I told you about the church retreat I wanted to go to? Well it is time to leave. The van is out front waiting. We are going to have a great time driving down. Two men from the district fellowship are also going to the retreat. It's going to be like a revival trip. Remember that crusade we went on when you were still in Bible College? Honey? Honey?"

They entered the dark room. One of the men questioned, "Tom? Tom? Your wife said you would lead a few choruses during the drive down. Tom?"

A mumble came from the back of the room. As they came closer they

heard, "This little light of mine I'm going to make it shine. This little light of mine I'm going to make it shine..." They gently led him from the room as he continued to sing. They nearly made it to the van before he suddenly screamed, "God will defend the righteous! His damnation will fall on all sinners!" As suddenly as the screaming started he started to softly sing again, "This little light of mine I'm going to make it shine, shine, shine. This little light of mine..."

After they put him in the van, the men consoled Mrs. Peterson, "He'll be all right. We've made arrangements with the local churches along the way. He'll have a nice quiet room on every stop we make on the drive down."

They drove away. Somebody forgot to close the front door on the parsonage. It swung open a crack, an empty house hoping to be filled.

* * * *

It was late but it was also the far north. The sun hangs low over the horizon for hours after it has set for the rest of the lower forty-eight states. The extra daylight gives many northern dwellers a summer insomnia that lasts from late May to early July. Lori and Jim had just finished a supper meeting with their lawyer, Sandra. It was an hour later when Jim started his walk. There would be a couple more hours of bright sunlight followed by an extended period of twilight. Jim had been unable to stay confined indoors and had left Lori at her father's and had gone for a walk alone to think.

He felt cheated. The stories in the movies and books all ended with everything being all right after the bad guys were gone. From their talk with Sandra, Jim realized that both Lori's and his problems had, in many ways, just started. The mechanical action of his legs pumping up and down somehow gave his frustration a temporarily outlet. Sweat dripped into his eyes. He tried to wipe the burning sweat away but only succeeded in smearing his glasses, disrupting his vision further.

Jim pulled his shirt and glasses off. He used the wad of material to mop the sweat from his body. He found the only dry corner of his shirt, spat on his glasses, and patted them half way clean on the cotton material. As he wrapped the shirt around his head to keep the sweat from flowing into his eyes, he saw the truck. He knew immediately it was that pushy woman reporter. He laughed. Finally, something to do. Something he could actually do. There was a small public wooded area just a short ways down the road. He started walking to it.

Every so often he would glance behind. The driver of the truck followed. They would turn down a side road or driveway until the truck was partially hidden by an obstruction. They would wait until he was nearly out of sight and then follow down the road to the next side road.

Like lemmings, they followed him into the mass of roads and trails of the wooded area. He led them to a hiking/ski trail that had been blocked by rocks to keep ATV's out. He watched from the bushes as Debbi tried to talk Carl into following him down the trail with the camera. She did get him to follow the trail for a few hundred feet. Jim used the time to let the air out of the truck's two back tires.

He left them with the mosquitoes. The gloom settled over him even thicker than the insects as he walked back into town. What was left for Lori and him? What about the money he still owed his father? What kind of work could he get and where?

Jim walked back to his car. He wanted to go and see Lori but his depression was still too deep. He went home instead. He called Lori. She laughed about the trick he played on the reporter. The joy her laughter gave disappeared after he hung up the phone. He drifted to sleep sometime after midnight with the thought, "Tomorrow is Saturday." Somehow things always seemed a little better when he visited his parents for the Saturday night sauna.

* * * *

Click. _The hands rest on the cards as if in prayer. The card is turned over._

An angel appears hovering between the clouds and the sun. His arms are outstretched in a blessing. Under his right arm is an apple tree with a snake. Standing before the tree is a naked woman looking up, her arms apart. Under his left arm is a tree with leaves of flame. A naked man stands in front, his arms apart. The angel with his flaming hair looks down upon the two.

The hands rest on the cards before reaching for the light switch. A full minute of darkness passes before the steps leading to the door are heard._

CHAPTER 22: The Lovers

Jim sat at the table in his parent's kitchen nursing a cup of coffee. His father was talking about something that had happened at his church, but he didn't hear. He examined the swirls the creamer had made when he stirred it into his cup. He heard a knock at the door. His mother left the table to answer it.

When she came back, she had Lori with her. "Jim, why didn't you tell us you knew Lori?"

Before Jim could answer or even look up, she continued, "Now, you sit right there, dear. How long have you known Jim?"

To Jim's relief, his father interrupted. "Mother! The sauna is hot. Why don't we let these two talk?"

Jim's mother was startled. She looked at the two younger folk, then the stern expression on her husband's face. "Dears, why don't you two talk while we go into the sauna?"

Jim heard his mother giggle as from a great distance as they left the kitchen. He was trying to watch his coffee's steam swirl into the air instead of Lori's face. She reached across the table for his hand. "We need to talk," she whispered.

"Lori, we can't be together ... Have to stay apart. They fired you. They claimed it was because of Jones' trying to kill you, but it was because you got involved in my court case against the school. And Jones went after you because he wanted to hurt me."

"You're wrong, Jim. Kawalski tried to blackmail me into bed by threatening my job. That's why I was in the case against the school. They fired me because I didn't quietly leave. I'm the one who went after them. And Billy Jones was crazy. We'll never know why he was trying to kill me."

"But I have nothing. Thomas told me that even if I win in court, I'll probably never teach again and probably never get any money. I'm nearly forty. The only thing I know how to do is teach and they will never let me do that again. I'm broke. I owe hundreds of dollars in child support. Every month I owe hundreds more. Soon the court will issue a warrant for my arrest. My ex-wife didn't believe me when I told her I have no money. My life is ruined. Everything I've touched in the last few years is gone. I'm just praying that I don't bankrupt my parents. They loaned me the money for my trailer."

Lori just held his hand. Jim refused to look at her, but from the corner of his eye he could see the curve of her face framed by her cascading hair. Jim heard the backdoor open. His coffee was cold. How could his parent's sauna be completed? It couldn't have already been an hour. Could it? He looked at Lori and lost all resolve. Behind her glasses, she scrunched her face and smiled.

"Jim, I threw in a couple of sticks of wood before we got dressed. The sauna should be just right," his father said, slapping Jim's back.

Barely able to talk, Jim cleared his throat, "Thanks Dad." Jim stumbled out the door. Lori followed. He wanted to stop her. He wanted to say something. He wanted to grab her and shake some sense into her. Instead, he just walked to the sauna.

Inside the dressing room, Jim finally spoke. He had wanted to say so much. He wanted to explain why she should leave. Instead he said, "Have you taken a sauna before?"

"Of course. I've lived up here my whole live."

Jim heard the sounds of her removing her clothes. In a panic, he stripped and stepped inside. Ignoring what was happening behind him, Jim wet the benches, cooling them so you could sit without burning your skin. He filled the dipper for throwing water on the rocks to make steam. He heard the opening of the door and padding of the bare feet as Lori entered. There was a faint gasp as the intense heat struck her bare skin.

Jim kept his back turned until he was sure she was seated. He tossed the water on the rocks. The needles of hot steam struck him as he wet two wash clothes and filled the dipper again. The steam blurred his vision as he turned to give Lori one of the cloths. Jim climbed to the top bench, draped the wet cloth over his face and let the heat penetrate his body. He kept his face covered with the cloth until he felt a cooling of the room. He used the wet cloth to grasp the hot handle of the dipper and threw some water onto the rocks. Again the needles of heat descended. Time slowed. Jim finally relaxed. He looked at Lori.

Something had happened. Most women that he had seen when they had gotten wet and sweaty, looked poorer. Lank hair draped in limp curls hugged the skull. Beads of sweat clung to the face highlighting any imperfection. Facial muscles loose from the heat sagging the curves of the face. Lori became beautiful. The delicate structure of her face stood out fully revealed with the mass of hair matted down with heat. The curve of her face was softened. The eyes that had been hidden behind the glasses sparkled.

Jim's eyes spotted a drop of moisture forming on her forehead. He watched the trickle flow down her nose, drip to her chin, drift down her throat and past the soft curve before her ribs. Instead of flowing between her breasts, the drop chose her left breast. Silently it flowed to her nipple and stopped, a glistening spark of light on the soft red flesh. He looked up and saw her eyes smiling in a multitude of shades and hues. Jim finally knew that nothing else mattered to him but those smiling eyes.

* * * *

The door opens. The figure turns on the light. The hands turn over the card.

A young man stands on a rise. He holds a staff before him. Six staffs are raised against him but there is confidence in his stance.

An audible sigh escapes the figure. The light turns off.

CHAPTER 23: The Seven of Wands

Henry enjoyed seeing a pro work, even if he was more than a little scummy. Jacob McKinsie was a pro. Jacob had the reporters avidly hanging to his every word. Henry knew that by the time the reporters filed their stories, he, Vernon, Frank, Al and all the others would be relegated to the status of _also_ worked on the case. Henry was more than a little surprised when Jacob told the reporters that he was the one to shoot Jones.

Jacob stopped by the office two hours before the scheduled press conference and, for the first time, insisted on a complete briefing of all the information on Jones's case. Henry had an easy time briefing Jacob, because Vernon at the BCA had all the forensic reports faxed over night to the sheriff's office. Henry had driven in to work early. He had still not recovered enough from shooting Jones to sleep though the night and had decided to work a longer day in hopes of being tired enough for a full night's sleep.

Jacob had absorbed the information at the briefing, only needing a little extra help on the technical details of the autopsies. Jacob, being the consummate politician, then recited the details of the investigation in the first person to the reporters. Henry never understood why the public always thought that the local sheriff was the best cop in the county. Didn't they realize that they voted for the county sheriff? That made the sheriff a politician, just like the local mayor or state representative. Most sheriffs had at one time been real cops, but usually years ago. Henry watched the admiration on the faces of the reporters as Jacob claimed personal guidance of the investigation. The only discordant note was from the Action News reporter,

Debbi. She kept scratching her neck and arms. Henry wondered how they would run the final TV news story with the red welts around her face. It was way too warm a day for a turtleneck sweater and the welts were too large to be covered by make-up.

Oops! Jacob wanted him to come up to the podium. He probably figured that showing off a subordinate or two would help on his re-election. As Henry stood next to Jacob, he finally realized something was wrong with the situation. Jacob usually only came to the third button on Henry's shirt and here he stood at least two inches taller than him. Henry glanced behind the podium. There was a box of files under Jacob's feet. Henry unconsciously shook his head in amazement. That scene turned out to be the lead on the ten o'clock news on two of the local television stations. It came out as the grizzled police veteran bowing his head in admiration of his superior's leadership.

* * * *

Jack Andrews called the hurried meeting in order to try to protect himself and the school board. At the meeting was John Jenkins, the school board chairman, with full authority to sign off on any deal struck during the negotiations. On the other side of the table were Sandra Thomas, Mike Garrison, local teacher's union rep, Lori Waithe, and James Makinen.

"Sandra, we need to get this settled. We only have the next few months before school starts in the fall to hire a new superintendent and principal. These court cases you have filed will just delay the whole process. How can we hire anyone while the cases are pending? You don't want the kids to suffer while this drags out for months in court, do you? Here's what I propose we do. First, Mike here can be on the search committee for the new administration. James and Lori can get one year's severance pay. How does that sound?"

"Jack, you've got to be kidding! I talked to Wayne Johnson before I came in today. You paid off Shermon to the tune of seventy-five thousand dollars. This is the son of the serial killer who killed two of your own students. This is the man who hired the serial killer to work in your school to begin with. And this is the man who with your principal is being investigated by the State for blackmail and embezzlement. Just who the hell do you think you are?"

"This is the second time you tried to sneak something past me. Now both you and the board are up to your pretty little necks in this mess, and it is all your own making. We either make sure this mess will never happen again and you treat my clients fairly, or we leave. Oh, Jack, you might be interested in this. With what I've found out so far, I'm inclined to add your name to the suit as a defendant and recommend to the Attorney General that you should be added to the criminal indictment with Shermon and the school board."

Jack sputtered. Why did he keep on underestimating that bitch? She was the union lawyer. Maybe if they got involved in the hiring of the new administration, he could skate something past on the criminal cases. It took three hours, but they worked out that the teachers would screen the applicants for the administration. They would also review the principal's and superintendent's job performance every two years. If the teachers rejected the performance of the new administration, the board would then not renew their contracts.

Lori and James had left the room early in the talks, and Jack had thought he had dodged the worst part of the criminal complaints until he had time to create a new plan. But then Sandra then spoke, "We'll just stop now for a minute so Lori and James can come back in." She got out her cell phone and called them.

Andrew furiously tried to plan an escape. He decided to try to settle with Lori first, since after all, she was not tenured and they would be legally within their rights to not renew her contract. After the two re-entered the room, Jack tried his opening gambit again.

"I think our offer of one year's salary is more than fair for Miss Waithe. After all, she has no tenure and we have no obligation to renew her contract."

Jack immediately braced himself for the verbal onslaught from Thomas. To avoid her, he made the mistake of looking at Makinen. Jack had always considered Makinen a nerd, one of the boys you teased in gym class, one of the boys the jocks would push around to impress the girls they wanted. Jack had been a jock in school. He had always had his way with the nerds. Thomas confused him. He never understood tough women. Maybe he could get back in control by pushing the nerd around.

But something happened. As Jack snidely pointed out Lori's lack of tenure, Makinen's face changed. It was as if he had been walking in the woods and he rounded a bush and came face to face with a cougar. Jack suddenly remembered that this nerd had fought a half a dozen young punks with his bare hands. He had thrown Jones through a window, a serial killer who had murdered two armed policemen. In panic, Andrews gave up.

After they left the lawyer's office, James turned to Lori. "At least you have a job this fall if you want one."

Lori put her arm around his waist as they walked. "I don't know if I could stand working in that place. Do you think they will hold with their deal?"

Jim's voice was hard when he answered. "They will honor their deal with you. They will probably pay most of what they promised me..." His voice softened as he concentrated on the emotions he felt in the room. "I think they will renege on my retirement and health insurance. I also think they will only hold to their agreement with the union for a year or two. They don't want to give up their power."

He turned to look at her, wanting to change the mood. "I want you to meet my kids. Let's drive out to California." He watched her face as she nodded her head 'yes.' He couldn't understand how such a beautiful creature could want him. He hesitantly put his arm around her shoulders as they walked down the street to their car.

Jim dropped Lori at her father's. He drove down the road to Jack Andrews's home. It was a large two-story, brick-faced house on a small lake in an exclusive section of town. Every house on the lakeside of the street was owned by a banker, business owner or a lawyer, except one. That one house belonged to the ninety-year-old woman who had originally owned the land the homes were on. It had three rooms and a porch. The porch was collapsing with the weight of hundreds of potted houseplants the old lady grew. She was too old to mow her lawn so grass and weeds grew knee high between the visits from her nephew. Jim parked his car on the lawyer's side of the boundary between the homes. He climbed up on his fender and leaned on back until he was lying on the windshield. He would wait to be noticed. He closed his eyes to nap.

Jim heard a car pull up. "Hi, Jim." Henry's voice said. "What are you doing?"

Jim sat up. He motioned next to him on the fender. "Come on up, Henry."

Jim waited till Henry found a comfortable place to sit. "Jack Andrews and the school board made some promises today. I wanted him to know that I expected him to keep them. Did you know they were going to fire Lori? They implied that since Jones tried to kill her, there was something wrong with her."

Henry sat still, his anger building. He was back in front of Lori's apartment. Jones jumped through the window, landing on the lawn in front of him. He saw Jones cower in fear of what was behind him. Even when Jones saw the pistol in his hands, Henry knew he was more afraid of what was behind him. Henry never understood what had happened but he was satisfied. He had seen the pictures of Charlie Manson, Ted Bundy, and the others in jail. It had always bothered him that in all the cases he had seen about serial killers, they never experienced the terror they inflicted on their victims ... until Jones. Jones felt the terror before he died. Somehow James and Lori had brought retribution to Jones.

"Don't worry, Jim. I know what you and Lori did. Most of the boys who worked on the case know what you did too. They all liked Al and Frank. We'll

make sure Jack keeps his promises. You go home now. I'll talk to Jack."

After Jim drove away, Henry walked up to the door. Perversely, he knocked instead of using the doorbell. Mrs. Andrews answered the door.

"Is Jack home?"

"He's still at the office. Thank you for getting that man to leave. Jack told me to call the police when I called him about it."

"Well, ma'am. You have nothing to worry about. That man was just waiting for your husband. He wanted to make sure he would honor the promises he made today. When your husband comes home you tell him everything was fine. My name is Deputy Sheriff Henry Hakanen. He can call me if he has any questions. I'm the one most people talk to if promises are not kept, so I will be checking up on things, making sure everyone lives up to their promises."

* * * *

The dark figure enters the room. Instead of heading for the table with the cards the figure goes to the window. The shades are opened just enough to illuminate the interior of the room. The figure, backlit by the window, goes to a bookcase in the corner of the room. There, a new deck of cards is taken, still in its cellophane wrapper. It is placed on the table. The hands start to collect the open deck but stop. They pull the last card from the top of the deck._

A man juggles two disks with pentagrams inscribed on them up and down. A continuous ribbon tied in a mobius strip signifying the infinite encircles both coins, while in the background two ships ride up and down the rolling ocean waves.

PAGEBREAK

She understood the official meaning of the Deuce of Pentacles, but both her mother and herself interpreted the card in a different way. There would be ups and downs, good and bad, love and sadness. The cards were refusing to tell what would happen next. You had to live with the joy of surprise, a life full of the infinite cycle of possibilities. In many ways, The Deuce was her favorite card.

A voice called through the doorway, "Lori, are you upstairs in your mother's room?"

The hands collected the used cards. She yelled back, "Yes, Dad. Just tidying up a bit before I leave." She put the used deck in the desk drawer, positioning the unopened deck exactly in front of the empty chair.

Her father came to the doorway. "God, how I miss your mother. You're a lot like her."

"I love you, Dad."

"The room will be waiting for you when you get back and so will I."

"I know."

"I think he's a good man."

"He is." She leaned up and kissed him on the forehead. She gave him a hug. Before the tears could start, she said, "I love you." Another hug and she ran from the room.

Jeffrey sighed and slowly closed the door. The silent room, the table and lamp, and the new tarot deck rested in front of the empty chair.

THE END

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