The Scarlet Knight

The Book with No Name,
Volume Two

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Chapter One

Bill found himself sitting by the water staring out at it wondering if it was deep enough to drown. He wasn’t necessarily suicidal he just liked having options. Bill was fifteen, about five-foot-seven and one-hundred pounds with reddish-brown hair. Most people would call him awkward looking with arms and legs that seemed too long for his body. As he sat there, he noticed a woman watching him. She seemed like she had a lot on her mind. Eventually, her stare felt awkward, so he got up and went down the path. He liked walking the trail that followed the Cuyahoga River. He was able to be alone even when people jogged or walked on by. In his back pocket was a folded dog-eared copy of Superior Spider-Man Volume four, a Necessary Evil. It was a used copy that was already folded, so he didn’t mind treating it like this. He had a good collection of comics back in his room. They were all that he really owned. Bill looked at his watch, it was 2 pm. His father should be on his way to work so the coast should be clear. Bill said to himself, “time to go home.”

When Bill was six, his uncle George gave him a comic book. He told him that life isn’t fair, but in the world of comics, it could be. Bill spent days staring at the book. He tried to read it, but some of the words
were just beyond what he could understand. Eventually, one of his older brothers took it and burned it in the backyard. His father had smacked his brother than him. He had said, “*that book might have had some value to it.*” He then said his mantra, “*everything in this house belongs to me you don’t own shit.*” By the time Bill was ten, his uncle George had stopped coming around. He had been a partner in his father’s garage. When it failed, the two brothers stopped talking to each other. That was nearly six years ago.

William Warren Martin was the fifth child of Nancy and Frank Martin. Nancy was a nurse at a local hospital, and his father Frank worked for a toy manufacturer in Hudson as a machine operator. Anyone who knew them would say she was the doormat and he was the dirty boot that ground its heels in deep. Nancy earned more than twice what Frank did, but he was still the head of the house. His failed auto mechanics business put the family in a large amount of debt. He took a job working second shift for a toy manufacturer so he could have some income that was from him. In the morning Nancy would make breakfast for Frank then pack a lunch for him. He would sit in the living room and watch television. Usually what he had recorded on the DVR from last night. Bill knew that it was a bad idea to be around in those hours.
before his dad went to work. Frank was never in a good mood.

Bill made his way home to find the driveway was filled with cars. His father’s everyday driver was there. A 1972 Chevy Nova. It was after three, and he was supposed to be at work. His older brother, Darren’s car, was there as was the twins Jason and Jennifer’s cars. For a second Bill thought about the river and just how buoyant he was. He wasn’t sure which one of his siblings he didn’t want to see more than the other. Darren would kick him when no one was looking. Jennifer once pulled his shorts down at the pool. Jason created a Twitter handle with his name and used it to harass girls he knew. His other sister Brenda told all her friends that he had a micro dick and had pictures of all the boys from one direction on his walls. On the way in he stopped and put his wallet in a secret hiding place out in the yard. He knew better than to take a wallet into that house. He kept another wallet with the same basic information in it without any cash.

He made it as far as the kitchen then one of them saw him. Darren grabbed him by the back of the neck and pulled him in close. He said, “just where the fuck where you. The family is having a meeting, and you missed most of it you whiny little piece of shit.” As
he spoke he squeezed the back of Bill’s neck. He then let go and pushed Bill into the living room. Frank gave his youngest son a look of disgust and anger. Frank said, “ok now that everyone is here I have some news. The plant laid everyone off with ten years or less seniority. I am now without work. This means that you are all without any money from your mother or me.” Jennifer said, “wow wait, what about my tuition. How am I going to go to school without that money?” Darren asked, “why the fuck am I here I don’t get shit from either of you two fucks?” Frank pointed at Darren and said, “you will show some fucking respect to me you little shit. You all owe me money from growing up, and I want that money now.” Darren said, “go fuck yourself.” He then turned and left. Bill hoped he would be gone for good.

With the profanity machine gone the family discussion became a session of pointing and name calling right out of Jerry Springer. Sitting next to his dad was a book. It was the false book Bill kept in his room. His maternal grandparents gave him a silver dollar every year for Christmas, Easter and his birthday. One year they gave him a fifty-dollar gold piece. He kept it hidden in this fake book. His father saw him looking at the book. He said, “everything in this house belongs to me, you don’t own shit.” His brothers and sisters all looked at him and grinned. That
collection was his way out of this nightmare. Now he had nothing but his comic books and the parks. Frank said, “and don’t think that this sets us even, you owe me.” His mother seemed oblivious to what was being said. She cooked food and made sure her husband had a full cold beer. Jason grabbed the wallet from Bill’s pocket. He tossed it to Frank who looked inside. All he found was two dollars, and an expired Metro bus pass. Frank pointed to Bill’s room and said, “clean that shit hole up. I don’t like my crap being treated like shit.”

Bill had three white long boxes filled with comics. Most of them were second hand, and many were marked and dog-eared to the point of being almost unreadable. Bill didn’t collect comics, he reads them. He knew these people that collected things thinking they would have some value later. His mom collected Beanie Babies for a while. Darren had a collection of Playboys with one of every printing from the first issue to when Heffner left the publication. He knew better than to keep them in the house. Bill found that someone went into his room and dumped the boxes out. A couple of the comics were torn apart. He knew that Brenda hated his comics. Almost as much as she hated him. He didn’t have time to mourn his books. His father would be in soon to make sure he was doing as he was told. About ten minutes later his door opened, and his father came in. He slapped Bill in
the face. The hit knocked him to the floor. He said, “that was for hiding the silver from me.” Frank left the room. His mother came in with an ice pack. She said, “I don’t understand why you antagonize your father like that. He just wants what is best for this family.”

That night after cleaning up Bill went to bed. He wanted to get into that school rhythm. Classes would be starting up soon and being able to get up early and get to school would be great. He could hear his parents. He so desperately didn’t want to hear them have sex. The squeak of the bed springs, the deep breathing of his father and his mother’s grunting sounds. Bill got up to get a pair of earplugs only to see Brenda’s Boyfriend’s car. She was naked, and on top of the jack ass, she was dating. He was happy that all he could see was her back. She was seventeen, and he was twenty-nine. A full moon lit the backyard. Just as Brenda was showing a full moon. Bill gazed into the night’s sky and saw an extra bright star. It was always there. He thought how that star’s light took millions of years to get to him. How that light shines on the guilty and the innocent. It shines for everyone and no one. How it was there when a man walked on all fours and would shine on the earth when humanity was gone, and all that was left was Charlton Heston and those damn dirty apes.
In the morning Bill left early so he wouldn’t have to receive all that love back home. It was Wednesday. New comics day. This would be a bittersweet new comics day because River Street Comics on Second street was closing. This would be the last day Dale would get the new comics. If Bill had a true father figure that would-be Dale Graham. He opened his comic store in 1972 after getting out of the army. He read comics while he was in Vietnam. While over there he spent most of his time going from firebase to firebase. The comics helped him keep his sanity. But all that was gone now. The new comics just don’t sell, and the comic companies were either sending him comics he didn’t order or telling him he had to buy the unpopular books to get the ones the customers wanted. Many people came in looking for collectibles and the high price crap that had little to do with actual comics. The final straw was when his landlord raised the rent. The whole neighborhood was slowly being regentrified, and his store was just too old school.

Dale was an old school kind of guy. He still did as much of his business with paper and pencil as he could. He was sixty-nine with enough gray on his head, so he didn’t need to show his ID for the senior
discount. He moved into his store when the city still had the nickname Caucasian Falls. He was a black man opening a comic store in a city known for being all white. As well as being a war vet. Dale wasn’t one for backing down or taking the easy way out. As he packed the old books, he wrote down the information on the books on the boxes. He was selling his inventory to a comic store in Summit Mall. They did the whole collectors schtick, but the owner was a friend and was giving him a good price. He would have to tell Bill that the last shipment was canceled by his supplier. He didn’t order the unsellable crap so he couldn’t have the ones people wanted. Today will be his last day open. He spent the last two days going through his old books including his personal collection and made a long box he would give to Bill. He would give it to him then let him know that he was moving to live with his kids in California. There wasn’t anything valuable in the box. Just good stories and amazing art. He picked up the box and found it was heavier than before. He thought how he needed to get in better shape.

On the way to the store Bill past Tina’s house. Tina Casado was in his class. She was sixteen with long strawberry blonde hair that she kept in a braid that she wrapped around her head like an old school teacher or librarian from the eighteen-hundreds. She called it a
Dutch braid. She dressed in old fashion dresses with large flower prints and wore large silver horn rim glasses. She didn’t fit in with any of the cliques. Her mother enforced a dress code for her so she would fit in better. But a pair of jeans and a trendy shirt couldn’t change her attitude. The braid, glasses, and dress all came together to make her look younger than her actual age, but she didn’t care. Tina lived her life by her own set of values and as she puts it, “anyone that didn’t like it can go suck hard candy.” Bill likes that she doesn’t swear. As he walked by her house, she was watching from her bedroom window as she watched him walk by. It was Wednesday, and she knew he would be by, and just maybe one day she would talk to him. She loved to watch him but was afraid to talk to him not knowing if he didn’t like her.

Bill passed the place where a couple of the older kids from his school like to hang. Kenny Woods and Dean Jacks were both nineteen and just now starting the eleventh grade. Kenny had long stringy, dirty hair that always smelt of smoke. It was said that Dean had a beard since the third grade. It was too early for them with school not being in session for another week. They loitered there smoking something and drinking something. What they smoked and drank would depend on just how much cash they could beat out of the younger kids. They were known for pulling
kids near the river and hanging them over until they got what they called, “their respect.” One kid pissed himself and was accidentally dropped in. He made it to the side of the river before he went over the falls. The falls were nothing like Niagara, but it still would have hurt. With the store closing, he might not need to come this way for a while. Walking by the spot, he could smell the stale cigarette smoke and the hint of beer.

Dale had a sign on the door, “going out of business last day.” Bill knew that this day was coming he just thought he had a little more time. He stopped and looked at the store. This store took him to Metropolis, Gotham, the depths of space with the Guardians and the multiverse with the Flash. He spent many good days in and around this store and soon it would be just another bingo gambling place to be shut down by the state. He opened the door. Dale said, “Hey kiddo, how’s the ladies today. Still beating them off with a stick?” Bill said, “what can I say, the ladies love a skinny boy.” Dale had a nervous habit. He would wipe down a clean counter to look busy. He knew that the boy saw the sign. He hated to leave this kid in this hell hole of a life he was born in to, but it was time, and he was going. Bill saw that the place for the new comics was bare. He said, “so they finally did it. What kind of business treats their customers like that?” Dale said, “one that is owned by a rat and makes all its
money-making watered down comic book movies.” Dale didn’t care for almost any of the comic book movies. He liked the first Iron Man but not much else. Dale went back to stacking the long boxes for their trip to their new store. Bill asked, “need a hand?”

An hour and a half later and the store was packed away. The sign was changed from closing to closed. Dale looked out and saw that the street was empty. He thought about how patterns repeat. When he came back from the war, there was no one to greet him, and now that he was going out of business there was almost no one to say goodbye. Although the one that did show up was his one true friend left in Ohio. He wasn’t sure how he grew attached to this kid. When his kids where young they didn’t seem interested in him or comics. His grandchildren are too young to know where their interests will take them, but they always seemed happy to see Grandpa. Unlike Bill, he has something to look forward too. Dale looked at the 38-snub nose Saturday night special revolver in a bag under the counter. He thought about giving it to Bill. It was untraceable. A guy tried to rob the wrong Vietnam vet and left with a broken arm and missing his gun. The boy’s father was a creep, but what would happen if Bill used the gun.
Bill said, “there is one box left here in this folding shopping cart.” Dale told him that the box was for him. He had gone through the comics going out as well as his personal collection and made him up a thank you for all his help and for being there at the end. Bill told him he couldn’t take something like this, but Dale was set on giving him the box and cart. Bill thought that the cart could come in handy when he moved into the street in a year or two. He knew not to open the box there. The gift was in the giving and not the box itself. Bill knew that it was time. He put his hand out and said, “thank you for everything.” Dale wanted to hug him, but he didn’t want to make a bad situation worse. He came in as a customer and left as a son, but it was time Bill went, and he left for his real family. He helped Bill out the door and turned out the lights. Two days later someone kicked in the back door and vandalized the store. Among the many profanities sprayed on the wall was a Swastika in orange paint.

Tina sat by her window listening to a Motown collection. Stevie Wonder was singing I Wish as her wish walked by. Bill had an old cart and a long white box. She slipped into her daydream about him. They were sitting on her couch in her living room. She went to take her glasses off when he stopped her saying, “I want you to see me.” Bill took his shirt off. He leaned in, and they kissed. Unlike her first kiss, this one was
perfect without any sort of overt agenda. She looked down at his pants. He stood up and unbuckled then unbuttoned his jeans. Underneath was a pair of silk boxers with hearts on them. She already had a good idea of what Bill looked like naked. Bill’s sister Jennifer pulled his swimming trunks down at the pool a couple of years ago, and she was there in the front row seeing it all. She grabbed his boxers and fell off the bench next to the window. The dream was over, and Bill had passed by. That night she had another kind of dream. One that she would never tell her mother about.

Bill put the cart by his window. He would wait until his dad was passed out on the couch and pull the whole thing into his room. Before going in, he changed wallets. Inside he found the house empty. A note on the fridge told him that Darren took his dad out to lunch. His mother went to work. Brenda was most likely polishing her boyfriend’s nob somewhere. The twins rented an apartment near the college. Finding himself alone he brought the box in. His first instinct was to open it and dive-in, but this might be the last comics he will get for a while. He wanted them to last, so he put the box underneath the others and went into the kitchen. On a counter in the kitchen was a beef roast. It was very big, and Bill knew that it was also very expensive. In the fridge was a set of two mini
kegs. Either his dad or brother pulled the roast out and replaced it with the beer. He could see the writing on the wall. His mother would flip out then his father would take it out on him. The roast was still cold, so he grabbed a cooler from the garage and filled it with ice from the freezer and ice maker in the basement. He then put the roast in the cooler layering ice on top. He might still get his ass kicked but it won’t be as bad. His mother very rarely got mad but when she did, then the whole neighborhood heard about it.

That night’s dinner was icy. Bill’s mom was not happy about finding her roast in a cooler and the fridge filled with beer. His dad had a man cave with a fridge for his beer. He had said his beer fridge was full and they wanted to have the mini kegs tonight. He then said, “I told dumb ass to make sure the roast was on the ice. If anyone is at fault, it’s shit for brains.” Instead of laughing about the absurdity of what he said his mother told him that he was grounded for not finding a better way. By 10 pm the kegs were empty and the roast was back where it belonged. Bill was in bed staring up at the ceiling. His father came into his room. As per the usual interaction, Frank slapped him. He said, “I don’t know what your game is you little shit, but it won’t work. I am your father, and as long as you live here, I am in charge. What you did was your
job not a favor so just let it go.” He then slapped Bill again. The slap knocked him to his bed.

His face was sore and as usual, everyone was mad at him for existing. He finally fell asleep. Last summer the police came into the pool complex and cleaned up the drug and alcohol problem. With a greater police presence at the pool, the bullies stayed away. It was the best summer ever. Bill went to the pool every day. He would meet up with his little gang, and they would swim and watch the girls. His little gang consisted of David Collins and Jim Hass. Jim was over six-foot-tall by the ninth grade with curly brown hair. One teacher said he looked like John McEnroe on stilts. David was present. Even he would say that his only memorable feature was his presence. He was average in every way. The three would sit and watch the girls. Bill realized that there were two kinds of girls that go to the pool. The girls that want to swim and the girls that want to be seen. The swimmers all wore one-piece suits while the others wore suits just big enough to meet the pool’s dress code. Bill watched Tina. She was a swimmer in a one-piece suit with a blue and white checkered pattern and a cap that covered her hair. The cap was white with a large pink gardenia flower print on the side. The next summer the police were gone and the older teens were back.
Bill woke up to the sound of someone in his room. He turned on a light and found Brenda. He knew she was looking for money. She looked over at him but said nothing. She went back to searching. After a while, she left with nothing. She had stopped and gone over to Bill. She went to beat the cash out of him when she saw his face. Bill wasn’t sure, but he thought he saw a look of sympathy or something. Brenda’s emotions were usually tied into just how quickly she could get laid. Sympathy or empathy was something new. Bill then chastised himself for thinking like that. After all, he wasn’t the only punching bag in the house. He should try and see things from her perspective. He closed his eyes and found himself in Tina’s bed or what he thought her bedroom looked like. She was in her bra and panties while he was in a pair of boxers with the Batman logo on the front. He ran his hand up from her stomach to her chest. She looked at him and said, “Beep, beep, beep.” His mother’s alarm went off.

In the morning Bill found himself alone again. His mom was at work, and his dad was out with a couple of his buddies fishing. In truth, they were drinking while watching bait water ski. One of his father’s friends has a boat. They take it up to Lake Erie
and go around Put-In-Bay island. They fish, but a lot of that fishing happens at full speed where the bait bounces off the surface rather than being in the water. These trips were usually two or three days. Brenda was also gone. It wouldn’t be for a while before he and his mother realized Brenda moved in with Craig her near thirty-year-old boyfriend. She took all her stuff and a couple of things that were not hers. When dad got home, he will either say good redens or call the cops. For now, he was all alone in a house where he wasn’t welcome.

Twenty minutes later and he was in a park along the river. This was one of the parks that flooded when it rains. At some point, the community just planned to let it flood rather than try and fight it. There was very little rain, so the water level was low. Bill walked the trail and watched the people. There were so many kinds of people in the park. Every day there was both the regulars as well as totally new people. On a bench near the water behind a large bush were two teens. He didn’t know them from his school, but they were there every day. They sat and kissed and watched the water. One day about a month ago he saw them in a hidden part of the park. They had a blanket spread on the ground and were making love. She was on top. They went slow and easy. Neither of them could see Bill. As he watched them, he realized that this was a
private moment and he was a creep watching them. Bill liked to see them on their bench. It made him think that a relationship can last. People are more than just taking machines. Taking what they can get from each other. A group of boys came running down the path. School wasn’t starting until next week, but football was already on. In front of the pack was his friend Jim Hass. He spent their first year in high school riding the bench. After that, he had said he would do anything to get on the field. When school had let out, Jim joined a gym. He spent his summer there, and it showed. The boy that was forgettable last year was now in front and noticeable.

As they passed Bill two of them said something and the rest laughed. The one that spoke stopped and walked over to Bill. He asked, “so how’s your sister.? Is she still as tasty?” His name was something Bill didn’t remember. He had dated Brenda or rather he had sex with her while they hung out in the backyard. Bill just thought of him as random dude number nine. He didn’t know if the number was right nor did he care. Random dude turned to the team and said, “she would fuck anyone with a pulse.” Bill was younger and smaller than this guy and his friends. He also didn’t care what they thought or said. That was until Jim spoke. He said, “yeah I tapped that one night while I was out running. She was just sitting there all bored. I
said that I had time to kill then she went down on me like it was an all-day sucker.” Bill knew that the first guy was just trying to start something, but this one was his friend. He also didn’t doubt the story. She had hit on Jim before when he was no one. To just drive the divided home a little more Jim came up and hit him in the gut. The force knocked Bill to his knees. The team laughed then went back to running. Bill thought about how this year was going to suck. Much like his sister.

Back home Bill found his mother in Brenda’s room staring at the empty closet. She had packed and left. No note or text. Nancy saw him and asked, “just how long did you know about this bull shit.” He just shook his head as if to say he didn’t know a thing. Because he didn’t. Nancy called Brenda only to find out that she left her family plan phone by the door in the kitchen. Nancy understood that this meant she wasn’t planning on coming back. Bill knew something was up but after hearing how she had been with his friend he just didn’t want to see her. That was when it hit home. His mother said, “she took the silver dollar coins from the living room.” Bill thought about it. His dad won’t believe she did it. He will think that he took the coins. Brenda’s escape was now going to cost him. His mother saw the look on his face and said, “well you should have kept a better eye on her then. Your father only wants what’s best for you, and sometimes that
means teaching a lesson.” Somehow a trained nurse saw bruises on her son’s face as a lesson. Bill knew he had very little time left. His father would come home and kill him. Even if he could replace the money, his dad would say that he was owed that as well as the coins then kill him.

Bill sat down and opened the box he got from Dale. Inside he found some good books. Dale seemed to know just what he liked. A reprint of the Secret Wars, Civil War and the death of Superman. In the back of the box was a book of some kind. He put the book aside. It was warm to the touch and felt a little weird. Underneath that was a bag. In it was a revolver. Bill thought to himself, “well he was pretty old. Just maybe he put this in the wrong box.” The book felt weird, but the gun felt wrong. Bill had a place in his closet where the trim was loose. He found that he could hide things behind it. He put the gun there until he could find a way to get rid of it. Bill picked up the book. It was still warm. It was a red leather-bound book with gold edging. The gold looked too thick to open. Bill held the book up to his nose. It smelled like apples. It reminded him of a time when his fifth-grade class went to a cider mill. He got up and sat on his bed. He had a light on a stand, so he could read at night. Bill opened the book.
Chapter Two

There was nothing on the first page. It did look like there had been something with an indentation of some kind. The page had no copyright material or any kind of publishing information. Bill thumbed the pages stopping about three pages in and found some weird writing and a drawing of a naked man. It all looked hand drawn. The alphabet didn’t make any sense. It was nothing like he had ever seen before. He thought that this might be either some sort of primitive anatomy book or porn. Bill closed the book. As he closed the book, he had this feeling like something had changed within him. He put the book down and went back to the box. Near where the book was there were seven comics that Bill had never seen before. He picked one up. Tales of the Scarlet Knight, Volume One. He opened the book to see a young boy in a bedroom that sort of looked like his. Like Bill, the boy was battered and bruised. The boy in the comic opened an old book and turned into a man. He went from gawky to handsome in a page. Then a suit of armor in the color of the name of the book.

Bill put the comic down and looked at the book. He thought to himself, “that’s just stupid. Maybe I have a concussion.” Bill went back to the book and opened it to the same page. That weird feeling came
again. Leaving the book open, Bill got up and went to a mirror. In it, he had changed from his usual self to a six-foot-two-inch man. It was like looking into a mirror and seeing someone else. Bill took off his shirt and found abs. He took off his jeans and found that whoever this was didn’t skip leg day ever. Then he saw it. When it came to his manhood Bill was average. This body in front of him was not average in the least. Bill stripped the rest of his clothes off and stared into the mirror. He thought that this was the weirdest brain injury. Bill turned a page, and everything changed. He was now in a suit of red armor. At first, it was like any armor in any movie about King Arthur. Then the armor changed on his body. The plating moved and developed different zones. These zones made it easier to move in. Bill closed the book, and he was naked again in his original body.

He got dressed just in enough time to see his father pull into the driveway. He was back early. His mother must have gotten ahold of him and told him about Brenda. Bill could almost see what was coming. Frank would come in. There would be words between him and his mother. Then he would come in and kill Bill. It went from bad to worse when Darren pulled into the driveway. The two went into the house. He heard them talking in the next room, but he couldn’t hear what was being said. Bill thought that it was them
planning his demise and a place to put the body. Without warning his door opened, and Darren came in. He said. “you can either fucking come with me or be dragged by me. I don’t fucking care.” Bill got up and went to his doom. In the living room, he found his father. He was holding the empty, false book. He had that same look of disgust and anger he always had when it came to Bill. He said to Darren, “let me do the talking.” Bill looked back at Darren. Maybe for the first time, he realized that he was nearly as tall as his older brother.

Frank moved to the edge of his seat in a conspirator’s hunch. He said, “I found a way for you to pay me back for your theft. You are going to work for your brother at the school until the debt is paid.” He tossed the fake book onto the floor. When it didn’t break like he thought it would, Frank picked it up and tossed it against the wall. The toss had just enough force to snap the cover off. Darren said, “that book would have been useful.” Darren told Bill that he would act as a go-between for him and his customers. Darren was a small-time drug dealer, with his main clientele being kids in high school and middle school. He used children so he wouldn’t get caught holding any drugs. Bill could see his life slipping away. He would be a prisoner of this family for the rest of whatever kind of life this was. Then he realized. Once
he knew his brother’s secret holdings, he could go to the authorities and just maybe finally be free.

Darren gave Bill a watch. It was a smartwatch that synced with a phone. He said, “when a sale is made this watch will tell you a number and a locker code. You will go and get the product in the locker and deliver it to another locker the watch says. No one will ever see anything suspicious, and you won’t touch the money.” Bill was surprised to hear his brother say more than a few words without any profanity. Also, he was surprised to hear just how organized his brother was. Bill knew not to say a word. Anything said would be repeated then he would be knocked to the ground for questioning his family. Darren saw something in Bill’s eyes he didn’t like. Steel that wasn’t there before. He felt a little unnerved and just maybe afraid. Fear wasn’t something that came naturally to Darren. He just wasn’t smart enough to understand just how much trouble he would be in if the authorities caught on to his operation. A door opened, and Bill’s mother walked out of Brenda’s room. She had a box filled with Brenda’s stuff. While they spoke, she was in the room clearing out any of Brenda’s things she left behind. Frank wanted her to toss the stuff, but Nancy put it in a closet just in case she wanted any of it back. Frank ended this little talk by unbuckling his belt. He
then said, “you still need to be corrected for what you did.”

That night Bill lay on his bed on his stomach. His back and ass were sore from the correction his dad dealt out with his belt. He could hear his parents going at it again. It seemed like every time he got his ass kicked by his father his parents would have sex. Bill closed his eyes and tried to block out the sounds of parental sex. The sound abruptly ended. He could hear water flowing over rocks. Bill opened his eyes to see he was in some woods next to a stream. The pain was gone from his back and face. Off in the distance, he could see mountains. None of this landscape looked like Cuyahoga Falls. Bill was in what looked like red leather pants with a white shirt and red leather boots. It all felt like it was tailored for him. Bill never had any new clothes. All his clothing came from the Village Thrift or Goodwill. He wasn’t vain, and it was better than going naked. He decided to follow the stream.

He walked for about a mile. As he walked a structure came into view. It was a stone wall. The closer he got the more buildings came into view. Bill climbed up a hill so he could see better. What he found was a small village that seemed to form around a large stone castle of some kind. The village looked like
something straight out of a Grimm’s fairy tale. Tutor homes with thatched roofs. He could see people going about in the village. Off in the distance, he could see something reflecting light in what must be the center of this castle-like structure. Bill walked around just about a half a mile away from the village. As he did, he found a gatehouse and a bridge that crossed over a moat and into the wall. On either side of the wall were two banners. They were both a reddish orange with a white circle in the middle. In the middle of that white circle was an orange swastika.

The Nazi symbol up against the medieval village seemed out of place. Looking down at the village he could see an occasional man walking around in a black uniform. They had a Gestapo like quality to them. Along the path to the gatehouse, there were crosses. On the top of the crosses were human skulls. Bill walked down to the path. As he walked by people stared at him. Shutters were closed, and doors slammed. He felt like a gunslinger walking into town. Only it was a town from a different era. Two of the men in black went to stop him then they hesitated and turned away. They seemed afraid of him. At the gatehouse, a man said, “papers.” He said it without looking up. Bill said, “I have no papers.” The man looked up at Bill. He then stepped back and said, “I am sorry my Lord, please proceed.” Bill crossed the
bridge only stopping once. He looked down into the water. Just underneath the surface, he could see something moving. They were long with an alligator look only more snake-like.

On the other side of the thick wall, he found a field of wheat growing on either side of the road. About a mile in there was a shorter wall. On the other side of that, he could see a tall steel and glass building. It didn’t seem to fit with the rest of the aesthetic. Like a Yugo in a parking lot filled with Ferraris. Everyone he passed bowed to him. Then he saw a young woman. She was maybe seventeen with sandy blonde hair that was in the same braid Tina wore. She had a scarf tied up in her hair with what looked like a traditional blue and white milkmaid’s dress like something from an add. Usually, when a girl like this sees him, they look away or look past him. This one smiled. He could feel his heart race. A beautiful girl was smiling at him. From behind he heard a voice, “good choice man, that looks like a good time.” Bill turned to see a disco stereotype. A man in red platform shoes with red bell bottoms, a red jacket and a white shirt with a butterfly collar. On his head was a white Panama hat with a red band. He put his hand out and said, “Ricky.” Bill took his hand and replied, “Bill.” As he shook the man’s hand, Bill realized his own hand was different. Bigger and somehow more masculine.
Ricky pointed back to the girl with his head. He asked, “so are you going to go for it?” Bill looked back. The girl was feeding chickens. She had an apron held up with one hand while tossing feed from it. When she emptied her makeshift container, she brushed off any remaining seed then turned to leave. Bill turned to Ricky and said, “this is the weirdest dream ever.” The girl went into a doorway. She turned back to Bill and smiled again then the door closed, and she was gone. Bill and Ricky went to her window so they could see inside. The girl had removed her dress and was in some sort of old-fashioned looking undergarments. She was brushing off any remaining dirt and feed from the dress and apron. Bill felt like a creep staring at her. She slipped out of her top showing her breasts. Bill turned redder than his pants and turned his back to the window. Ricky smiled then got closer. He looked at Bill and saw just how uncomfortable he was. Ricky knew that the girl knew they were there and all this was just a show for the boy’s sake. In fact, five different girls smiled at him on the way in. Each one was different, a young Chinese girl, a Latino lady with curly brown hair and others. This whole thing was so they could tell just what or whom the boy found attractive.
Bill turned back to the glass tower. It was something straight out of New York City or a science fiction movie. Ricky said, “there used to be a big castle keep made of stone here, but the new king and queen wanted their place to feel modern.” The windows had a mirror-like tint to them that reflected light up the streets of the town. Bill realized that the village seemed familiar. It kind of looked like the Village of Hudson. The part that was from when it was an old farming community long before it became a place for rich people from Cleveland and Akron to hide away in. It was downtown Americana with a cubist sculpture in place of a gazebo. He saw more of the orange swastika banners on the glass building. Ricky said, “yes I had a hard time getting used to that as well.”

Bill awoke to find the pain in his back was still there. His dream felt real for some reason, but he knew it just wasn’t. He got up and put on a shirt as carefully as possible. On the way to the kitchen, he passed his father in the living room watching television. Frank gave him a side glance then looked away. Bill got the idea that his father knew he went too far with the belt. When Bill was ten, his father had grabbed him so hard that he dislocated Bill’s shoulder. He gave him the same look back then for about a month. His mom was off to work. She left a note saying, “take this” with a
circle on the paper. Whatever it was when she put it there it was gone now. Bill knew that his dad’s calm just might be from the pills and the vodka breakfast. Frank was passed out by 11am. Bill didn’t want to be there when he woke up. He went back to his room and put on a pair of socks and his shoes. Ten minutes later and he was out of sight of the house. Free from them for the day.

Down in one of the parks on a basketball court, a group of girls was playing ball. Maybe at first, it was a friendly game, but by the time Bill got there, it had turned into an elbow tossing free for all. One girl was watching from the side with a red eye that would be black come tomorrow. In the center of the melee was Tina. She had on medium length basketball shorts, a sports bra underneath a loose tank top were the bra could be seen from the sides. It was clear to anyone that knew her that she was the one that took the simple “let's show off for the boys” into the cage match it was. Several of the girls were on the basketball team, but Tina was the star on this court. He thought that she always seemed a little out of place with the other girls. The other girls considered themselves unconventional individuals, but most of them have the same clothing, the same three hair colors and the same jewelry. If nonconforming means not following the crowd, then Tina is the true individual. In a sea of pink, purple and
jet-black hair she stands out with her strawberry blonde. After a hard hit to the back, Tina pushed one of the Jennifer’s to the ground. Her boyfriend charged the court and Tina. He was saying something to Tina when she kicked him in the genitals. To Bill’s surprise, many of the girls took Tina’s side, even as her kick ended the game.

Down by the river, Bill found the teen lovers. They were there just like every other day. Bill half watched them, and half watched the water. A couple of men were fishing in a place where there were no fish. From behind he heard a voice, “it’s not nice to stare.” He turned to see Tina. She said, “the fish don’t like it.” She walked up to him and stared down at the water wondering why she just said that. She just had a “you go Girl” moment and followed that up with a clumsy, awkward attempt to talk to the boy she was in love with from afar. Bill had thought she meant either the teens in the park or the game. He said, “I don’t think there are any fish in that water.” In his head, he could see a ball being passed from her to him. On it was the word Awkward. As in the awkward ball was just passed to Bill. Tina turned to Bill and pulled him in close. She kissed him, and the two fell into the water. Tina shook herself awake wondering why her quick daydream had them in the water. She thought, “Maybe I wanted him wet?” She immediately blushed and said,
“I got to go. I’ll see you, Bill.” Bill tried to speak, but all that happened was a wave that he wasn’t sure she saw. As she walked away, he watched her and thought, “she knows my name.” Tina realized she almost said love instead of “see.”

Back home his dad was gone. Another night of whatever he and Darren did. Bill pictured strippers and drugs. A message on the machine said his mother was working a double to help with the bills while Frank was not working. Dinner was a can of soup. The kind with little burgers with potatoes and carrots. He cleaned up then went to his room. He lay on his bed and thought about the game. In his head, the game was a little more sexual than physical. The girls were playing in sports bras and extremely short shorts. A golden aura was around Tina as she owned the other hapless girls on the court. Occasionally, she turned to him and smiled. He could see this fantasy as real as the actual game was. At one point she slam-dunked the ball with such force that the backboard shattered. The force knocked all the girls to the ground. Tina let the ball go and came over to Bill. He realized he was just in a pair of boxers with little basketballs on them. She pulled him close and hugged him. Then she looked up at him. He could feel her next to him. She was naked, but so close he couldn’t see anything. She kissed him.
Across town, Tina was having a daydream much like Bills.

Bill realized she was gone and he was back in that woods next to the stream. His weird dream was back for an encore. This time he knew the way back to the castle. On the way, he felt like he was being watched. He made it to the outskirts of the village. Just before he left the woods for the path, he heard a distant sound. Like a voice saying, “I am the true king.” He passed the man in the gatehouse and made his way into the castle. On the other side, he found a group of people. They were in the same black uniform from before. All but two. There was a man in a cream-colored uniform with reddish orange trim. A woman in a cream-colored dress with shimmering orange crystals attached to the upper part of the dress. The man saw Bill and waived him over. Bill noticed that the man and woman didn’t have any Nazi symbols on them. Bill didn’t want to offend his dream, so he bowed to this man and woman. The man said, “welcome to my kingdom. I am King Hendrick Schulze the first, and this is queen Lotta Schulze.” The king looked Bill up and down then asked, “what might be your name, good sir?” Bill said, “my name is William Warren Martin, but most people call me Bill.” King Hendrick said, “another American. I am starting to think that America was the only country left.” Before Bill could say a
word, King Hendrick said, “*welcome to my kingdom. There will be a house set up for you. You can change anything you want. You can have almost anything you want. Just remember who is in charge here, and we will get along fine.*” With that said King Hendrick turned and walked away.

A young boy walked up to Bill, and without a word, he took him by the hand and led him into the inner wall to a small house near the center. The house was a two-story tutor with a thatched roof. The door opened, and the young woman from the last dream was inside. She went back to sweeping the floor. The boy smiled then left closing the door with Bill and this woman inside together. She stopped sweeping and led Bill to an armchair. He sat down, and she climbed onto his lap. Bill didn’t understand what was happening. He didn’t even know this woman. She kissed him, and the Kiss felt real. She was warm and real. She said, “*my name is Nadia. I am here to serve you.*” She kissed him again. As she sat there kissing him, Bill could feel her breasts against his chest and he could also feel himself getting hard. Nadia whispered into his ear, “*I can tell this is going to be fun.*” She started to shift her hips. Bill felt his heart racing. She said, “*it has been so long since I had a man.*” Bill awoke in his bed. It was nearly 6am. He looked up at the ceiling and wondered what that dream was.
The time to go back to school was drawing closer. Bill was looking forward to going back until he found out he would be a drug mule or something like that for his brother. His sixteenth birthday was today. He wondered if the current crop of sex dreams were a sign of things to come. He also wondered if thoughts of sex would occupy all his time? His mother was up and getting ready to go to work. She was quick and quiet. When she left Bill went out into the house. She didn’t fix his father his usual lunch. There was a note on the table saying his father was out of town on a temp job in Pittsburg. He would be back in a day or two. Bill knew this was crap. He was most likely in Las Vegas with Darren. This trip was his brothers usual one just before school started. When the school was open so was is enterprise. Bill got dressed in a pair of basketball shorts and a tee-shirt and went for a run. He didn’t run as much as he used to. He would run for hours back when he was in elementary school.

As Bill ran, it started to rain. As he ran, he was able to push all the negativity out of his thoughts. He focused on his breathing and the pace of his run. Tina saw him go by. Without thinking about it, she joined him. First behind him then next to him. They made it to an underpass just as the rain became a downpour.
They stopped at the underpass, so the rain could run its course. Tina said, “happy birthday.” Like Bill, she was all wet, and her clothes were clinging to her body. Bill wondered if this was just a dream. Tina got close to Bill. She had this all planned out while running with him. As soon as they stopped she would say happy birthday then kiss him, but now here she was, and she just couldn’t do it. She stared into his eyes then turned and ran into the rain. Bill followed her and soon they were in the park where the river was rising. Bill sat down on the empty bench. The teens he saw every day all summer were gone. Tina sat down next to him. Bill tried not to stare at her chest as the rain-soaked shirt clung to her making her breasts more pronounced. He stared into her eyes as she stared into his. It became a staring contest of sorts. Bill leaned in, and Tina did the same. They met in the middle and kissed. The contact was just a little too hard, and the kiss was just a little too wet, but it was a kiss, and they both meant it. Tina backed away realizing he had kissed back. She looked down to see she was nearly exposed with all the water on her white shirt. She got up and ran. Bill wanted to follow her, but he had to wait for things to tame down before he could go.

Bill came home to find a box on the table with a note. The note was from Brenda. It said, “I just thought that somebody in this family should remember
your birthday.” The box had a round cake with the words, “Happy sixteenth birthday Bill Dog.” Bill Dog was a nickname she gave him when he was young. She wanted a puppy. Their older Brother Jason put a collar and leash on Bill with a tag that said, “Bill Dog.” Bill thought that it took her leaving to see that she wasn’t really a bitch. Just maybe she was an actual sister like on television. There was the fear about eating a cake from her. An incident happened where she baked some brownies with a laxative in it. Their dad ate the entire batch. The house smelled like crap for days. In the box just underneath the cake was an envelope. It had nearly three thousand dollars in it. Another note said, “hide this in that spot in your closet just in case you need a way out.” This just confused him. He knew that the coins were worth way more than three thousand but why would she risk coming back with any money into this house. If their father had been home, he just might have hurt her then taken the money. Bill had this hazy recollection of him spanking her over his lap then her saying to their mother that he had a hard-on while he did it. Their mother then slapped her. She was thirteen.

Bill checked the closet. The gun was still in its place, so he put the money in with the gun. While in his room, Bill changed into some dry clothing. He heard something in the kitchen. Bill thought about the gun, but then realized it must be one of his siblings.
Then he thought about the gun again. He found Jennifer and Jason eating the cake. Bill was angry until he saw something in the lid. Something was written there. Jason laughed. He said, “tasty cake bro did you bake this yourself.” Jennifer laughed then she said, “just like a little girl.” The message in the lid said, “Bill don’t eat this.” Bill watched them finish the cake then he said, “that cake was from Brenda.” He then smiled and walked away. An hour later and the twins were tripping in the living room. There was some sort of psychedelic drug in the cake. An hour after that they had moved into a spare room in the basement. They nailed the door shut from the inside saying, “don’t let the rabbits get us.”

A door closed, and Bill found himself in his new house in his dream. She was there. Nadia once again got into his lap. Bill said, ‘well why not” and he kissed her. As he kissed her, he put his hands on her hips. Nadia pulled a string. Her top fell, and Bill was with a topless woman. He stared at her, at them and realized he didn’t want her like this he wanted Tina, but most of him still wanted this. She locked on with her legs and ground against him. All thought left his head. Nadia then stopped kissing him. She jumped up and backed away. Bill looked down and saw he was his usual self. The girl asked, “just how old are you?” Bill said, “sixteen?” She pulled her top up and sat
down. She said, “I might not look it, but I was twenty-three.” Bill asked, “was?” She looked away and said, “I did something I couldn’t take back, and before this place, I thought I would be trapped forever.” Bill said, “you can stay here as long as you want. Consider this your house too.” Bill thought that his dream just became way too serious.

Tina watched out her window. It was Sunday, and school started tomorrow. She watched for Bill and hoped he would walk by. She also hoped he would stay away. She spent the night awake thinking about the kiss. What his body looked like all wet. He seemed different somehow. She knew that if she had stayed then just maybe they wouldn’t have stopped at kissing. A long shower and a clean, dry set of clothes helped her see she did the right thing. Now here she was, sitting by a window waiting for something to happen. She looked back at a mirror in her room. She realized that this wasn’t her. She wasn’t the kind of girl that waited for things to just happen. She made things happen. She would go to Bill, tell him how she felt then. She stopped at the word “then.” She looked out the window. Soon she was staring out it again feeling a little less than empowered.
The river was swollen after the downpour yesterday. The part of the park that floods were flooded. Bill found that his newfound love for running was giving him a new reason for not being at home. Frank was back, and he had to break the door down to help the twins get out of the room they nailed themselves into. His anger was through the roof. Bill slept in the garage. He had what was becoming his usual awkward dream with a woman he was living with and saw him as a kid. His sex dream was very sexless. School was tomorrow. His brother gave him a phone with the ringer set to vibrate. It was the cheapest phone that would work with the watch. Something a television show would call a burner phone. He was told to never call out on it or even open it. He took a little of the money and bought some new clothes. Something that would work for school. He tried to not think about Tina or Nadia’s breasts. Most of all he tried to stop thinking about what he was going to have to do. About all the lives his brother ruined with drugs and how he was about to join him.
Chapter Three

Nadia was out doing her usual daily routine. Feed the chickens, milk the cows and collect eggs. Most of the milk and eggs went to the castle keep where she sold them for other goods. Back home she saw her door open and a couple of the king’s guards just outside. One of them pushed the door open the rest of the way and made an enter gesture. She knew it wasn’t a request. Inside she found the king and another couple of guards. The guards took her by the arms and led her to a chair. Before forcing her to sit one of the guards cut her dress off her. She sat naked with these two men holding her arms back. The king sat in a chair near her. He said, “you were brought here because you looked like his little girlfriend. You had one job.” Nadia went to speak, but the king held his index finger up shushing her. He said, “We could easily put you back where we found you. If anyone knows it would be you that there is a special place in hell for someone that kills their own children.”

In 1952 Nadia and Victor Kosch escaped from a work camp in Poland near the border with Russia. They made their way to a port and out of Europe. He was a well-known author in Poland, but when they finally made their way to the west, no one had heard of him or read anything he wrote. They eventually settled
in a small town near Boston, Massachusetts where they had two children named Hanna and David. Victor worked as a milkman delivering milk and other dairy products to people’s homes. He wrote at night. One night after his twentieth rejection letter Victor washed a bottle of pills down with a bottle of Vodka. Two years later, Nadia was seeing a man that could provide her and her children with a good life. He had told her he didn’t want kids. One night, Nadia started a little gas leak in her house and went to her second job with a cleaning service. The police found her and told her that her house exploded, and the explosion killed her children, boyfriend and ten other people in the surrounding homes.

At trial, she broke down and admitted to trying to gas her children, so she could be with him. After a plea and a conviction, Nadia was sentenced to life in prison, but life turned out to be one year. In her time in prison, the other prisoners and the guards regularly beat Nadia. Neither group would tolerate a child killer. One guard would make sure she was in solitary so he could rape her without any witnesses. Her life was a never-ending series of beatings and horrors that seemed to have no end. Eventually, she was hit so hard on one brutal attack that she died from internal bleeding.
She died in a prison cell alone and unwanted. She found herself floating in a black stagnant pool. Around her were the voices of the people she killed. Two of them were her children. For what seemed like a thousand years they asked her, “why.” As she floated, she could feel all the pain and agony her victims felt. Not just in the last moments of their lives, but every pain of every moment of their existence. She felt the pain she inflicted on the living. Those people that were left to go on without the ones she killed. When she seemed to accept her fate, it would change. That was when her tormentors from the prison would appear and relive what they did to her. This went on until one moment when the pool drained. She found herself in this weird place. A medieval castle. She was told that if she followed the rules, she could stay, if not then hell was waiting for her return.

The security unlocked the doors and school was back in session. At 7:30 am Bill got to commit his first crime. The watch went off, and a code showed on it “A1 23-31-13 green.” Locker A1, the code was for the lock and the baggie to be pulled. Another message gave him the locker to deliver to and the code to get in. The baggie had what must have been pot in it. Bill did as he was told and just like that he was a criminal.
Fingerprints and most likely DNA on all the surfaces. This happened two more times that day, another baggie of a nasty smelling plant and some pills. Bill would find out the pills were Adderall. In a weird twist most of his teachers from last year were his teachers for this year, but unlike last year Tina was in most of his classes. Bill could remember the look of her nipples through the wet shirt. Her smell and the taste of her lips. Tina’s dreams went much further than his dreams of leaving her unable to look Bill in the face.

On the way out of their first day of school, Bill saw Darren talking to a security guard. Suddenly it all made sense. He would need a person on the inside to let him in to plant the stash. A guard might not want to sell or deliver, but he might just look the other way. Bill’s attention went from his brother to Tina. She was standing there talking to some girls. In what was being called “the kick heard around the school” Tina was now popular. Even the girl that was pushed was with her. Bill noticed that the entire time they talked Tina kept looking back at him. Bill went to walk past her. His goal was to stare at her while not staring at her. Tina was riding high on her new-found fame. She saw Bill and decided she would speak to him without delay. As he came closer all she saw was him in his wet clothes from that day and her dreams that night. He went by, and she said nothing.
Bill got home to a note from his brother saying he did a good job. Bill reread the note again. Darren had never said or wrote anything like that to him before. He knew that his brother’s mood could change all at once, and he could end up with a black eye or worse, but for now, he would accept that he was happy with him. Bill had a hard time trying not to think about the three lockers and the kids who were even now ruining their lives with the drugs he delivered. He also thought about his father. He could see the man forcing him to keep doing this job even after the debt was paid. After all, he was in his father’s house making his life is father’s property. He wondered just why his father was such a bastard. He knew that he was a failure or at least he felt like one. Just maybe taking it out on him made his father feel better about himself. Bill could picture his father at a craps table rolling nothing but snake-eyes all the while saying how it was his fault.

Frank came home from a long trip. His family thought that he was in Las Vegas or some other place a man like him would go. In fact, he was very close to home. He owed someone a lot of money in Youngstown, Ohio. There was a time when the automotive industry was a big deal in Youngstown. Back then organized crime ruled the streets. His father
Frank Sr. was one of the bosses. He ran his little neighborhood. When Frank Jr. wanted to start his own business, he took out a loan from his father. The loan was a friends and family on the side discount loan. Then his father disappeared. Everyone knew that he was at the bottom of Lake Erie, but no one would say why. Frank Jr. found himself in debt to his father’s partners. The simple loan had a sir charge and an interest hike turning the twenty-thousand dollars into a hundred-thousand. When this happened, he told his brother who backed out of the business. Without him, the business failed. He thought about his family. The son selling drugs to kids, the twins in college. Brenda shacked up with some guy nearly twice her age. Then there was the boy who might just not be his.

That night Bill lay in his bed thinking about her. He closed his eyes and found himself back in his sexless sex dream. Bill looked around and realized just how dark and depressing this place was. He said, “if this is my dream then I want to make it into something I want to come back to.” The room lightened. The kitchen went from a hearth based room to a kitchen straight out of the 1950’s. The basic furniture disappeared. A leather sectional formed in the living room with a large flat screen television. In the back, a room lit up. A bathroom was formed with a tub big
Nadia was outside chopping wood when the lights came on in the house. She walked in to see a kitchen she would have fallen in love with back when she was alive. She felt at home in the 1950’s décor. The front room was all one room with the kitchen and living room together. The kitchen was from her time, but the other side was the future. She walked into the living room then looked back at the kitchen. She could almost see her two children sitting at the table eating breakfast. Then she saw them face down and motionless. She knew she was just a little too happy. She said to herself, “after all I am in hell.” She then heard a sound that warmed her heart and made her think she just might have been forgiven. A toilet flushed. Bill walked out of the room in the back where she had kept the wood for the hearth. She passed him and went into a full bathroom with a large tub and a shower with twenty shower heads. She thought about what the King said. She wondered if she could really do this forever.

Bill woke up and got dressed. It was day two of his sophomore year. The first day was like a dream or nightmare. On his way in he saw his old friend Jim. He
was with a girl hidden away near the school. He didn’t
know the girl, but she looked young. Jim had his hand
up her shirt, and her right hand was feeling the front of
his jeans. About noon he saw the girl in the freshman’s
section of the lunchroom. As he sat there and casually
 glanced over at her Bill could feel a presence nearby.
Jim sat down next to Bill. Then three more of the
football team joined them. Jim said, “I can’t help but
notice you staring at my girl perv.” Bill didn’t say a
word. Jim leaned in and said, “we might have been
friends when I was nobody, but now I am a somebody.
You best keep your place, or I’ll put you in it
motherfucker.” Bill fought the urge to laugh. Jim and
his teammates got up and went to leave. Jim turned
back and picked up a history book on Bill’s table. He
tossed it into the trash. Bill didn’t care it wasn’t his
book. It was sitting there when he sat down. He knew
better than to bring a book into the lunchroom.

Nadia sat in her bathtub surrounded by hot
water and bubbles. She felt better than she had since
she died and went to hell. Just outside the bathroom
door, she heard a noise. Two of the king’s guards came
in and picked her up out of the bath by the arms. They
tossed her on the floor in front of the king. The king
hunched over and asked, “are we enjoying this little
reprieve?” Nadia stayed on her knees and the palms of
her hands. She could feel the king and his guard staring
at her. The King said, “we think we know just what this boy will want so you will see things change around here very soon.” Nadia didn’t look up. The king said, “do your job and make the boy happy or we will replace you.” He got up then pushed Nadia over with his foot. She went to her side and stayed there. The King said, “just remember hell is filled with worse people than you or me.” The king left. Nadia got up and went back into the bathroom. She stared into the mirror and said, “you can do this. Think about all that you will lose if you don’t.”

Bill came home to the sounds of his parents going at it in the living room. He passed it as quick as possible, but he still saw his mother in his father’s lap. Her face buried in his neck while she moaned. Frank’s head was back and seemingly staring up except his eyes were closed. Bill went into his room and closed the door as quietly as possible. He then waited for them to finish. Bill laid down on his bed and closed his eyes. He woke up in the house in his dreams. He was in a recliner part of the leather sectional with his feet up. He could smell something flowery. Something he associated as being feminine. Nadia came to him with her hair down. She was in a simple white dress with a flower laurel in her hair around the crown of her head. She came in and sat down next to him. She smelled wonderful. The floral scent mixed with another scent
he didn’t recognize made him more than a little warm. He tried to hide his growing interests. He didn’t want his dream to feel uncomfortable with him.

Nadia could see and feel that what she was doing was working. She had a little time to seduce this boy, but the longer it takes, the greater the chance the king will go another way. She figured that seducing a teenage boy should be easy. Especially one that thinks this is all a dream. She put her head on his shoulder and hugged his arm. She looked up and saw him looking down the top of her dress. She wore this dress, so this view could be possible. She slowly took his hand and put it on her thigh then she slowly moved his hand up. She could feel his heart start to race. Maybe out of some sort of instinct, Bill started to move his hand in a circular motion as he rubbed her inner thigh. He saw what he was doing and pulled his hand back. Bill said, “I am sorry I.” Nadia put her finger on his mouth in a shushing motion. She looked down at his lap as seductively as she knew how. Bill’s eyes went wide. She smiled then lifted the dress, so she could climb into his lap. In his lap, she could feel just how ready he was. She leaned in, so her dress was open in the front and her breasts were nearly in his face.
Bill woke up in his bed. It was nearly 4am. He could feel the heat of Nadia on his skin. His dreams were so real. He wondered if seeing his parents in the living room had changed what he had dreamed about. The thought of his parents having sex was enough to damp down his erection. His thoughts turned to Tina. Nadia was left on the sectional facing down where Bill was. She thought that just maybe he wasn’t as ready as she thought. She knew he was a virgin. His lack of experience was making his ability to do anything in his dreams difficult. This didn’t change anything. Her job was to make him happy. The king had told her when she was freed from her prison that she was there to help this man feel at home. She wondered why it was important to get this kid.

On the way into school, he got several texts with locker instructions. As he distributed the drugs, Bill noticed much of the drugs were legal over-the-counter drugs such as aspirin and cold medication. The school had a zero-tolerance policy toward drugs. This ban included such drugs as aspirin and Midol. The ban was a part of a larger movement to make the school a safe place. This also included the ban on bringing a packed lunch or cell phones. Certain forms of dress and words were also banned. In the newsletter, the school provided a list of words that were banned and what could be said instead. Words such as President
Trump where banned and in its place was just The President or Trump but never together. His and hers or boys and girls were removed from everywhere but the locker rooms and restrooms. New words were added such as the band became the inclusive band. While all this was deliberately done to make someone feel more comfortable with the school, it did leave many out of the loop. Zero-Tolerance left some children to hide something such as their allergy medication as if it was an illegal drug. Because in the school, it was. All medication was given out by an official with the school. Not a nurse. For legal liability reasons, the school couldn’t have a nurse. This person treated his new power like a king giving out favors. And he had his favorites.

Bill did what he was told, and at the end of the day, he went home. For once he felt a little better about what he was doing. Most of the drugs were the legal kind. Going to the Vice Principal and asking for acetaminophen was an aggravating process. It would include him calling your parents seeking permission, and if he didn’t get it, then you were given detention for wasting his time. That day a girl was found with a box of Midol and was suspended for harboring a drug on school grounds as well as possibly distributing it. He heard one of the girls say, “her cramps got her kicked out.” The level of fear in the school was on an
all-time high. Bill felt like a rebel fighting against the system. He knew that was all crap. He was pushing drugs on kids that had no business in taking them without adult supervision.

All that day he thought about both Tina and this woman from his not-so sexless dreams. He wanted to understand just what his dreams meant. He figured that the woman was just his mind’s version of Tina and his inability to do anything with her represented his inability to talk to Tina. Off in the distance, he could hear his parents fight. As always it was about money. Frank said that she wasn’t working enough to make up for what he lost. She countered with the lack of money from his trip. She had clearly yelled, “Vegas isn’t a way to pay the bills.” He knew that the fighting would end, and the sex noises would begin. In a way he preferred the sounds of them fighting. An hour later and the sounds of his parent’s headboard hitting the wall echoed throughout the house along with the muffled cries of his mother and the profanity-laden chant of his father, “oh god yes, you fucking whore. You like it like this don’t you bitch.”

An acetaminophen PM and a shot of vodka he was able to sneak out of the freezer helped Bill fall asleep. He woke in the bathroom in his dream house.
The shower was on but empty. The mist from the water felt warm and inviting. After looking around and seeing he was alone, he got undressed and into the shower. The twenty heads hit him in all the good parts. The soap had an unusual smell. A musky scent that was something like his father would use. As he lathered up a hand came from around him. Nadia took the bar of soap and soon was lathering up his back. Bill could feel her get into the shower with him. She pressed up against his back. Her heat was warmer than the water. He could feel her breasts up against his back. Her hands came around and started to rub his chest. She moved her hands back to his back and up to his neck. All the tension left his neck but not the rest of him. Bill knew he was at a point of no return. He was in a shower with a beautiful woman. It felt too real to be just a dream.

Bill turned to face her. She was naked and beautiful. He leaned in and kissed her. The kiss was closed-mouthed and as chased as a peck on the cheek. It just reminded Nadia that this boy was just that, a boy. Someone who had never been with a woman in any real way. She pulled him down to her and kissed him. She did it open-mouthed and with tongue. Nadia decided it was time she helped this boy get over his fear and become a man. Bill put his hands at her side near her chest. Nadia led his hands up to her chest. She
gazed into his eyes and tried to give him her best “I want you” look. She backed out of the shower and walked into the hall. She turned to Bill and said come with me with her eyes and finger. He went into what was a very basic bedroom. A bed and dresser but no color or any other creature comforts. Nadia was on the bed. She was laying on her side showing the curve of her back and backside. She padded the bed. Bill went to join her. A hand came from behind Bill and pulled him out of the dream.

Bill woke up on the floor with a pain in his back. Then a kick to the stomach and another to the groin. Even without being able to see whoever this was Bill knew it had to be Darren. Bill was picked up by the collar of the shirt and tossed up against the wall. Darren said, “what did you think I wouldn’t fucking find out.” He didn’t give Bill a chance to answer. He struck him across the face with the back of his hand. Frank came in with his gun. He saw what was happening and asked, “what did the little fuck do now?” Darren told him that three of his stashes in the school was raided and he lost a lot of inventory. Bill had no idea that the school was bringing in drug-sniffing dogs at night, and they found three of the lockers. Darren said, “it wasn’t even anything illegal. They found aspirin and shit like that.” Bill said, “I don’t know anything about it.” Darren picked him up
and kneed Bill in the stomach. He said, “I don’t give a fuck what you say.” He beat Bill until he was black and blue. Later he would find out about the dogs and how none of the students knew. His guard on the inside kept the dogs away from the illegal stashes. Nadia looked at the empty place where the boy was and wondered if she would ever get laid.

The next day Nancy found Bill in a fetal ball on his floor. He lay there unable to move because of the pain. For a second, she wondered why she let this treatment go on. She knew that Frank hated Bill. Around the time Bill was conceived she was having an affair with her boss. Frank had insisted he was to be named for what he called “his true father.” All the tests in the world couldn’t convince Frank that Bill was his son. She called the school and told them he was in an accident and would be out for a few days. Darren heard this and said, “no fucking way. I need him there to do his job bitch.” Darren was over six-foot while Nancy was around five-foot-three. He tried to tower over her, but something in the back of his head told him to back off. After seeing the bloody bruised knuckles on Darren, she could tell Frank had little to do with the beating. She gave Bill something to help him sleep. He slept, but he didn’t dream.
Chapter Four

The king stood near a window and looked down at the house. The boy was a test. If he could keep it going, then just maybe he could remain king. It would all hinge on this boy. But Hendrick didn’t understand boys of this time. In his time giving a teenager access to a naked girl would result in one thing. He also didn’t like trusting this Polish girl. As a member of the special services with the Nazi party, he killed many Polish soldiers as well as civilians. He liked to see them scream as he turned on the spray and watched them burn. Now he was the one that would burn if this polish girl failed. His wife, the queen, worked at Auschwitz as a guard for the children. He was happy to live his afterlife as a knight. Taking the throne was never a part of his plan. When their reality started to end, he fell onto the throne. His presence seemed to calm down the land as it would seem that the land picked him.

The king had ordered a search of the land for the creature named Vot and the giant named Cain. The voice of the book was also called the voice of temptation or Vot. He was a force made to serve as an administrator for the book and its holdings. After the failure to take the last book holder Vot went missing along with the giant named Cain. Vot was able to go
between the worlds as well as interact with the other forces of the book. He was there to make sure everything went as it should. He would appear as a three-foot-tall man in a multicolored suit, but in reality, he was tall and ugly looking. His absence was felt by all the residence in the land. Vot didn’t pick the recruits, but he did administer to their recruitment. He would know how to get this boy. The king wondered what would Vot do. He needed the voice.

On a rock on a hill overlooking the castle, Vot sat watching the community that developed while he was away. When the book didn’t go dark, he knew he was safe. Someone took control. He left Cain in another place. When the world was falling apart, he fell back on his first job as Cain’s protector and took him somewhere he would be safe. He then waited to blink out of existence. When that didn’t happen, he made his way back. Vot now didn’t know what his purpose was. He sat there wondering was he to serve the book? With Cain gone is there still a need for new knights? Who took the throne? Why has the village around the castle grown? The village was built for the girl so she could feel important. Without her input, the souls should have returned to hell. He thought about Cain. Should he have forced him to come back? If he did would it signify the end? He knew that none of his questions would be answered by just sitting there and
staring down. He could feel someone calling out to him. He thought to himself, “the Nazi?”

Vot thought out to the book. He found himself in the bedroom of a young boy. He was beaten black and blue. The book was on the floor underneath a long white box filled with what he thought were some sort of magazines. He opened the first book and was introduced to the world of comics. Heroes and villains with both clear definitions and a surprisingly fuzzy line between good and evil. Some of the Heroes were not very heroic, while some of the villains had altruistic motives. He knew that he could work with this. He looked over at the boy and said to the book, “good choice.” In one section of the box was a series of comics that were about knights. Vot could tell that the book made them. The book made its plan and was waiting for someone to finish it. Vot looked at the boy and said, “The Scarlet Knight.”

Hendrick sat on his throne pondering his next move. The woman failed to seal the deal with the boy, and he was now nowhere to be found. He could go and threaten her again, but would that accomplish anything? He liked having her naked at his feet. He knew that the queen was having an affair with one of the knights. Most likely the red and white knight.
Ricky was hitting on anything that looked female. From his side came a voice, “lost, are we?” He turned to see Vot. At first, he wanted to grab the little man, but he knew better. This was just a cover for the real Vot. Instead, he asked, “where have you been?” Vot smiled and said, “out.” Hendrick wanted to scream, “OUT,” but he knew better. Vot said, “I saw the boy. Good choice, but I don’t think you know your audience. This boy wants to be a hero, not a lover.” Vot shrugged his head then said, “well not just a lover, a good choice in a woman for the boy. She works well for his tastes.” Hendrick thought about his kingdom and his rule. He asked, “what can we do?”

Bill woke up in his bed. He tried to move, but his bruised ribs and face made any kind of movement an agony that was almost unbearable. A slow turn of the head helped him to see the door was closed. He could also see his long boxes where gone. His closet was open, and the boxes were not inside. Someone took them. They were all he had left that was his. He thought about the money in his hiding spot as well as the gun. Leaving this place was now not just a certainty but a necessity. He could see his father or brother killing him. Darren had nearly done just that over something he had nothing to do with. His door opened, and his mother came in. She was in her nurse’s scrubs and had the smell of disinfectant on her.
He watched her walk in and stare down were the boxes where. She shook her head then came over to Bill sitting down on the side of the bed. Nancy said to Bill, “Darren was wrong in what he did he just was angry about all the money that he lost.” Nancy pulled out a needle and injected Bill with something. He felt the pain float away along with his mind.

He woke in his dream house to find it in ruins. Someone took a hatchet or ax to the inside. The door was gone as was the woman named Nadia. He walked out to see fires and destruction. The village was in chaos. A small child walked up to Bill. When he got closer, he could see he wasn’t a child. He was a small man. Vot said, “Good sir the castle was raided. They took many women including Nadia. They went west.” Bill could feel his anger rise. As it did the red armor, he had once tried on appeared on him. He looked at the little man and asked, “west?” Vot nodded. Bill looked deep into his mind and found Superman. He then jumped into the air and flew west. Vot smiled saying to himself, “you just have to know your audience.”

Bill was about a hundred feet up when he spotted a group of men in grayish armor making their way west. On the way, he saw some sort of monster with blue strips of metal for clothing. The men in the
grayish armor had made camp around a fire. One of them tossed a young boy onto the fire. He landed in a place where the wood wasn’t burning yet. Bill came down and picked the boy out then placed him on the ground. The armored men got up and drew their swords. Bill formed two swords and went after the men. The first one jabbed at him, but he might as well have been trying to swat a fly. Bill shifted to the right and knocked the man’s sword away. His hand went with it. The momentum forced him into the fire. Bill clanged his swords together then said, “who’s next.” The other men looked at him then dropped their swords and ran. The man that fell into the flames had rolled through to the other side. He ran after the others with smoke trailing behind him.

Bill looked down at his hands. At the armor. He felt great and strong. He felt like he did every time he read a comic and the good won over the evil. The boy came over to him. He asked, “what is your name good sir?” For a second, he wondered if it was better to have a secret identity or live in the open, but then he saw Nadia. Bill took off the faceplate and helmet. He said, “I am William the Scarlet Knight.” As soon as he said it, he regretted it. There was a college team with that name and a mascot that was a pure Roman centurion. Nadia came to him and hugged him. She said, “I thought I was lost for good.” The boy thought that she
was laying it on a bit thick. This was all a setup to help Bill see his potential. Nadia knew that if they had made it back to where these men were all of them would have been raped and killed. She wondered just what this boy had done to be sent to Hell and why didn’t he fear going back?

Bill took to the air and watched over the women and the boy as they made their way back. He also followed the line of smoke left by the man. At the castle entrance, he changed back to his usual clothing. Bill and Nadia walked home to find it still in ruins. Bill closed his eyes and thought about the house as it was. He opened his eyes, and the house was back. For a second Nadia could see herself having to live in ruins. This boy was doing for her what she had always wanted. She could see spending eternity with him. She also could see doing other things with him as he became the kind of man she wanted. The house was a little different on the inside. There was a strange box in the kitchen on a counter. She had heard of microwaves before but nothing as fancy as this. She opened the fridge to find food and bottles of Coca-Cola. Bill stood and watched her. He watched her form and figure. In his other dreams, she had been trying to seduce him. Now she was in awe of him.
Bill came up to her and spun her around. He kissed her on the mouth. The kiss was deep and was not G rated at all. Nadia could feel something change in him. A simple fight changed his demeanor. She didn’t know that Bill had never stood up to anyone. His hands found their way to her sides then the sides of her breasts. He brought his hands around to the front of her dress and undid the buttons. She shook her shoulders and was free of the dress. She pulled his shirt off. When she did, he was no longer the boy. He had changed into the man from the book. Nadia thought to herself, “now this I can work with.” They made their way to the bedroom. On the way, they shed their clothing until they were both naked. Nadia got on the bed, and Bill followed. She got on her back, and Bill pushed her legs apart. He took a quick look at her naked form then into her eyes. She said, “please.” Bill plunged into her. She tensed up with the size of this boy inside her. Bill started to thrust into her. Nadia said, “oh god, oh my god.” She threw her head back and let out a sound that was less a word more of a cry. She wondered if this was one of his powers. Bill finished and went to her side on the bed. She turned to him and put her hand on his chest. She whispered, “I love you.” At that moment she thought she did.

Up in the castle, Hendrick watched the house. Next to him was Vot. He asked, “so that was what this
“kid wanted. To be a hero?” Vot said, “of course not. He wanted to stand up for someone and himself. The two are not necessarily the same thing.” Hendrick turned toward his bed. The queen was asleep with two children on either side. They had found these two little children abandoned in the castle. They weren’t sure if they were from Hell or were something else. Neither of them was over the age of three. By the end of that day they had adopted them, and they moved into the castle keep. Hendrick couldn’t understand why she wanted these children. He knew her history back in the camps. How she was responsible for taking care of the children, but she was also a part of killing many of them. Even if not directly. They couldn’t have children. No one could. Just maybe this was the way.

Bill woke up feeling better about himself and just a little sorry. His dream had him as a superhero, but the hero doesn’t sleep with the person they are saving. He had never felt anything like what he and Nadia did that night in his dream. He thought that he could still smell her sweat on his body. He got up and found all the pain was gone. He left his room and went to the kitchen. Darren was there fixing a sandwich. He saw Bill and went for him. He was saying on his way to Bill, “you lying motherfucker I knew you were just faking.” Darren took a swing, but Bill dodged it then caught his arm after it went by and struck him in the
lower back. He then pulled Darren’s arm down while bringing his left arm up. There was an audible snap when the two met. Darren screamed. He then brought his other arm around in a roundhouse that hit the cupboard rather than Bill. Another audible snap when his hand broke against the wood. Darren looked back then he backed away. He looked afraid. He saw something in Bill’s eyes that made him rethink his place in their relationship. Bill watched as Darren got into his car on what would be a very painful drive to a hospital.

Bill got dressed and made it to school just in time. He was told he could stay, but he would need a note if he were to return Monday. He saw Tina. She was smiling and talking to three other girls. She looked over at Bill, and the two met with their eyes. He felt a spark that lit him up and made him feel like he was staring just a little too hard. Bill looked at his book then thought about how he just stood up to his brother. He started to think about ways he could approach her. He could just walk over and say, “hey Tina how’s it going.” No. He could just wave and see if she responds. No. He could walk over to her pull her up and kiss her like that day in the rain. If he did that, then he would get either suspended or maybe even expelled. So, no. Bill looked over, and she was gone. From behind him, he heard, “Hi Bill.” It was quick and
clipped. The hair on the back of his neck stood up. He also stood up and turned around to see Tina. She was standing there holding her books in front of her in her arms.

Tina was in a stall in the girl’s bathroom on the second floor near her last class. She still had her books in her arms holding them up against her chests like a shield or armor. She replayed what just happened in her head. She had walked up to Bill as he sat there staring down at something. She tried to sound nonchalant, but it came out almost chirpy. Bill stood up and somehow, he seemed different. Somehow stronger than before. She had pushed through her nerves and spoke again. This time it was strong. She had asked if he was busy this weekend. He had said, “not really. I am open to anything.” She smiled then said, “I am open for you.” She cringed over the words and the innuendo. Then she asked, “how about another run?” She had both involuntarily bit her lip then licked it. She realized it was also suggestive. When she left, she realized he hadn’t said anything about what she said.

Bill walked home thinking about Tina. She spoke to him. Unlike Nadia, Tina is real. In his dreams he can talk to Nadia but awake, he can’t seem to string
a complete sentence. She had left the door open for him to ask her out, but he couldn’t speak. He just felt lucky that she couldn’t see him getting hard at the sight of her. He realized this was a problem. She had said something about running again. Maybe she would meet him for a run, or he should stop by her house. He watched her walk away, and he hadn’t said a word. Bill’s mind then returned to what happened back home with Darren. Was he coming home to an angry family or a shallow grave? No one seemed to be home. Bill found a note telling him that something happened to Darren. His parents were at the hospital, and they wouldn’t be home until late.

Nadia was waiting for Bill by the door. She felt wrong about what happened the other night. She also desired him and what they did that night. Part of that was that she was finally fulfilling her job. She was brought in to be a damsel in distress for his hero persona. She saw what looked like a little boy walking her way. When he came closer, she could see it was a fully-grown man who was around three foot tall. Everyone knew who he was. Vot pushed past her into the house. He turned around staring at what this boy did to the medieval theme. A mix of 1950’s and twenty-first century. Mostly a lot of wood and chrome with hints of that scarlet. Vot went past Nadia again without speaking to her. He looked at the new glass
and steel keep. Finally, he turned back to Nadia. He asked, “so little girly, do you think you are needed here?” Nadia didn’t answer. Vot smiled then said, “that’s ok any answer you could have given would have been wrong.” He smiled then turned back to the view from the door. He said, “I think we will see some changes to this place very soon.”

Bill woke up in his bed in his imaginary house. Next to him was the woman Nadia. They were both naked. To him, it seemed like no time had passed from when they had made love. Bill thought, “was it making love or having sex or is that the same thing?” When he thought about Nadia, he thought sex, when it was Tina he thought love. Nadia was his first even if only in his dreams. Laying like this she looked more like Tina than before. She rubbed his chest in a slow circular pattern. He could feel the touch working on him. He had felt bad how he had taken her that night. It felt forced and wrong. Almost a quid-pro-quo for saving her life. But nowhere with her rubbing his chest with her hand slowly working its way down all, he could think about was this beautiful woman in bed with him. She slid on top of him then kissed him. They started to have sex for the second time, but this time it didn’t feel as wrong to Bill as before. Nadia did her best to put the age of this boy out of her head. When she was picked for this job, they had altered her to look young. She
was to be a proxy to this girl the boy was in love with. He might be young, but she realized that he was both resilient and inexhaustible. She dropped into his chest then rolled to his side. Bill just lay there wondering just how he was having such a vivid dream.

After some awkward side glances at her from Bill, Nadia said, “you should see what’s happening outside.” Bill got up and went to the door. Just before he opened the door, Nadia said, “maybe with some clothing.” He said, “if this is a dream then does it matter?” He looked down at the semi-flaccid third arm that was his penis in this dream. She said, “I would hate to have you scare off people or make the horses jealous with that thing.” Instead of looking for clothes he thought about them, and they seemed to form around him. Scarlet red leather pants with matching boots. A white shirt straight off the set from a pirate movie. He opened the door expecting to see the cross between a medieval village and small-town America. Instead he saw what looked like a small version of New York City. Their house was now a classic brownstone overlooking a cobblestone sidewalk and a black asphalt road. There were trees and street lights. There was a road but no cars. He looked to both sides and saw the street went on for a while in a curved pattern. The castle keep at the center was now a large dark spiral.
Bill looked over to his right and saw his clock. He blinked when he woke up in his bed. He got up and took a shower then made an egg white omelet. He decided that either way, with or without Tina he would run. He thought about how he could approach Tina. Maybe he could just go to her house and ask if she was ready. No. He could Text her, but he doesn’t have her number. As he sat there, he heard his mother speaking with someone at the door. Bill peaked around a corner to see Tina. She was in short running shorts, a loose tank top over a sports bra. She said she was there for Bill. They had a run planned. Bill ducked back. Nancy came around the corner with a smile on her face. She saw Bill dressed for running. She whispered to him, “she’s so cute Billy what are you waiting for.” Bill looked back and saw her there. She gave a slight wave at Bill and smiled. Nancy gave Bill a slight push. He met her at the door. He started to ask where she wanted to start when she pushed him and started to run. He caught up with her and soon they had a good pace. They made their way to the park and along the river. A two-mile run became six. Near the place where they had their first and only kiss Tina stopped and stretched. Bill did the same while looking at the bench they had sat at. Unlike that day this one was sunny and warm.
Tina said, “this is nice. I have a hard time running alone, you know keeping a pace and all that. It’s nice to have someone there to have a rhythm with. To move in.” Tina instantly replayed her words and counted all the innuendos. She thought to herself, “at least I didn’t ask him to go into the bush and take me.” Bill asked, “what?” Tina wondered if she had said all that out loud. Bill tried to deflect from his blatant staring at her body by saying, “maybe we can do this more often.” Tina smiled then replied, “that sounds nice. I wouldn’t mind running with you every day.” The two went back to running as Tina wondered if she said running or riding. They both knew that this was Ohio and winter had a way to derail outside running, but there were plenty of places they could run inside.

They ran all the way to Tina’s house. In her mind, she pulled him in and up to her room. They made love all that afternoon. But what happened was they parted with a promise to meet up in the morning and go again. She had said, “I can’t wait to see you, Bill.” She felt her saying his name on her lips like she could feel that kiss hours after. Bill walked home fighting a cramp. He never ran so much in one go. He felt so good that he didn’t want to go home. He could see himself going back and kissing Tina. He tried to make up reasons for going back until he got home and reality set in. Darren’s car was in the driveway along
with his father’s car. He would now have to face what happened in the kitchen yesterday.
Chapter Five

Bill opened the door and went inside. His mother Nancy was in the kitchen fixing something. She quickly looked to Bill then back to what she was doing. He couldn’t tell if that was just a look of acknowledgment or something else. She disappeared into the living room then back into the kitchen. There she said to Bill, “your brother is here.” She shook her head then looked back to the living room. She said, “somebody attacked your brother. He said there was two or three of them. They took his wallet.” A tear went down her cheek. She said, “they broke his arm then three of his fingers.” Bill let that lie roll around in his head. He didn’t know what to expect from Darren. He suspected he would come up with some story where he attacked him with a bat or something. Bill turned toward the living room where he could see the top of Darren’s head in their father’s recliner. A big no, no.

He slowly walked into the living room. At first, Darren didn’t see him. When he did, he jumped a little. Bill saw something in his eyes that he had never seen before. He saw fear. Darren was afraid of him. Bill knew that this was in his favor, but he also knew that it could backfire. Darren said, “listen to me you little shit stain if you want to live then just shut your fucking
mouth and let me do all the talking.” Darren looked back at the kitchen. He said, “as far as you know I was attacked by three guys trying to steal my car. That is what mom knows, and that is what happened.” Nancy came in with a glass of water and a bottle of pills. The glass had a straw. She took out a pill and put it in Darren’s mouth. Then she held the glass while he took a drink. All the while Darren stared at Bill. She looked at Bill then said, “Darren needs his rest.’ That was his signal to get out.

Bill went to his room and fell onto his bed. He wondered just how he got away with it. That was when he remembered his long boxes with all his comics. He had checked all over the house, but they were nowhere to be found. He knew they had to be somewhere. It was in moments like this when he thought to himself that they were just things and things didn’t matter. In those days after his grandfather’s death when the men came for the money his father owed, Bill had things. A television, a computer, a phone and some collectibles that his friend from the comic store didn’t like. His father took it all and sold it to try and pay them off. Eventually, they took his father’s business and all the tools inside. Even with that he still owed them money. The money continued to grow with an interest that would keep him in debt to them forever. Bill rolled
over in bed and saw something in the corner of his eye. In his closet was a glimmer of gold.

He followed the glimmer and found the book. A fallen shirt had covered it. Underneath the book was more of those homemade comics. They looked professional, but they had nothing to identify who made them. Bill counted them to find there was more than before. The book felt warm to the touch and had a smell of metal and just maybe apples. It reminded him of a field trip he took in the third grade to a cider mill. The smell of the freshly pressed apples with an underline mechanical smell. The next year they went to a recreation of a cider mill that used wooden presses. It was later closed due to an E Coli outbreak. Bill thumbed the pages again. Then he put the book down. He looked at the comics and wondered if they influenced his dreams. He put the book and the comics and put them in an old book bag he had from elementary school. The bag was too beat up for his father to sell.

Bill got back into bed then turned to the wall. Instead, he found himself in bed with Nadia. They were both naked underneath a scarlet red blanket. He got up and looked around for his clothes before he remembered and thought about clothing. He wanted to
see the city that was outside that door. He went out the bedroom door and found he was on the second floor. Before that night the bedroom was on the first floor. He went down the stairs to the door opening it to find a new world. Most of the signs of the medieval times were gone. The inner castle wall was still there as was the outer wall. The street and the brownstones followed the walls curve. In the center of the circle was the spiral and a park. The spiraling tower grew three or four stories since he last saw it. There were no cars on the roads, and people seemed to stay off them unless they were crossing. When they did cross, they ran. The people were dressed in what Bill thought of like 1950’s attire. The clothing had an almost cartoonish quality. The colors were too bright and too new.

He walked down the street. People bowed to him as they passed. They also gave him a wide berth. The people parted, but they stayed off the street. He walked a complete circle around the inner castle. Back at their brownstone, he met up with Nadia. She was looking over the city as if she hadn’t seen it before. She said, “when I went to bed it was still a medieval village. Now I seem to be in New York.” Bill said, “every time I come here there is something new.” He was feeling bold. Bill pulled Nadia close then kissed her. They both looked back to their brownstone. The brick had a deeper reddish tone than the others. Nadia
pulled Bill back and said, “they need you at the keep.” Bill looked toward the spiral and said, “I guess I shouldn’t keep them waiting.” His armor formed on his body and he was off into the sky. Nadia said, “no, I don’t think I’ll get used to that any time soon. Nope.”

On the way, Bill noticed that the Nazi symbols were gone. In their place was an orange flag with a black symbol in the upper right corner that looked like a pair of wings. He came in onto a balcony at the top of the spiraling tower. From this height, the tower looked like a spiral noodle. A pair of doors opened, and Hendrick came out. He was at first shocked to see that the boy had his armor. It was supposed to be impossible to wear the armor in the castle. Bill bowed to the orange king. Hendrick said, “that won’t be necessary my boy. We are all friends here.” He held out his hands then brought them back together. He said, “I called for you because we need your help.” Hendrick told him that a small village about three miles away from the castle was suffering flooding and they needed someone who could help deal with the problem. Bill said, “I’ll go right away and see what I can do.” He took to the sky without another word. Hendrick said, “I didn’t dismiss you, boy.”
On the way out, Bill saw just how much the castle had grown. The wheat fields were now a sort of suburb with rows of neat little bungalow-style homes that reminded him of Cuyahoga Falls. On the outside of the walls, the village was still straight out of the middle ages, but it too had doubled in size. Up in the air, Bill could see the village and the curving river that was cresting its banks spilling water out. He could also see how the river was once two rivers. Someone had diverted one into the other. He figured that a deeper river made it possible to send boats to the castle. The dry riverbed was empty. He came down near the earthen structure. He broke a tree out of the earth and used it to scrape off about two feet off the waterworks. The excess water spilled over the dam and down the dry bed. The leader of the village said they built it, so they could send boats easier. Bill replied, “yes but when you built it the water must have been at a lower level. When the water recedes, we can replace your earthen dam with concrete that will have a relief valve so when the water rises we can keep it from flooding the village.” Off in the distance, Bill could hear a faint ringing.

Bill woke up to his alarm. He felt tired like he hadn’t slept. He came out of his room and saw his mother talking to Tina. She was in a pair of short gray running shorts with a gray tank top that had a Nike
logo on them. She asked, “are we still running today?” Bill bolted for his room. In his haste, he didn’t close his door all the way. Tina followed him to the hall and found she could see him in his room with the help of a full-length mirror on his closet door. He stripped off his shirt. Tina started to turn away when he took off his shorts. He turned his back to the mirror then took off his boxers. She looked around trying to see more than his ass. Then he turned around. She had seen him like this before when they were younger. His sister had pulled his swimsuit down at the pool. She could see now that Bill was more of a man than that day by the pool. Tina didn’t notice that Nancy had come up behind her. She said, “now that’s something you don’t see every day.” Tina backed up against the wall with her hand over her mouth. Nancy smiled then asked, “are you two?” Tina couldn’t speak all she could do was shake her head no. She then said to Bill’s door, “I’ll be outside balls.” Outside she realized she said balls instead of Bill.

They made their way down the path and to the bench where they had their first kiss. It seemed to be a stopping point for every run. Tina asked if they could sit down for a second or two. After they sat down, Tina said, “I think your mother asked if we are having sex.” Bill took his eyes off her chest and looked away. He then looked back into her eyes and asked, “what?” The
word came out short and clipped with just a little anxiety. Tina started to tell him she caught her staring into his room watching him change. Then she realized she didn’t want him to know that. She said, “it makes me wonder just what are we doing? Are we friends? Are you my boyfriend or a boy that just happens to be my friend?” Tina looked around then back to him and asked, “is that something you want? Does the title mean anything to you?” Bill wondered just what she wanted to hear. Does she want to be something more than friends? He then decided he would say what was on his mind and let the truth set the tone for whatever is to come. Bill said, “I can’t say what’s right or wrong when it comes to such things. All I do know is that I like you and I would love to be able to be more than just a friend.” He remained staring into her eyes. Tina felt warm all over. She looked away then back and said, “I think I wanted that way back in the fifth grade. That day in class when you gave that speech on Moby Dick and how it relates to social popularity.” Bill had a hard time remembering the speech. As he tried Tina leaned in and kissed him. She then got up and said, “oh yeah, when you got dressed this morning you didn’t close your door, and I saw everything.” She turned and ran leaving Bill on the bench.

Bill walked home thinking, “I have a girlfriend. She saw me naked. I have a girlfriend that saw me
naked. I have a girlfriend that kissed me and saw me naked.” Bill walked into the house. Darren called him into the living room. He said, “listen shit stain I don’t know how you did what you did I just want you to know that nothing is fucking over. Tomorrow you will start moving my shit. I want all the product sold by Friday.” Darren looked at Bill in the light of the sun from the windows. He seemed taller than just the day before. He said, “I made sure that the heroin was put in a locker in your name so don’t think about turning me in.” A plate dropped in the kitchen. Nancy came in and said to Bill, “go to your room.” Darren said, “I’m not finished with the little jackass.” Nancy said, “oh I beg to differ. You are finished. I want you out of my house now. I can look past a lot.” She looked toward Bill’s room. She went on, “I see so many lives ruined by that drug at the hospital. As long as you are selling it, you are no son of mine.” Darren got up. He asked, “but what about?” He trailed off then said, “you know this?” Nancy said, “I wiped your ass when you were a baby and for far longer than I should have. It’s time you cleaned your own ass.”

Nancy packed his bag. Darren said he couldn’t drive because of the drugs. She said she would take him home. He had yelled, “but this is dad’s house. I think he should have a say.” She said as plainly as possible, “if your dad wants his dick sucked then he’ll
side with me.” Darren realized he had no way out of this. He got in the back of his car. He didn’t want to sit next to his mother. She said, “I’ll give you a week to get rid of the drugs then I call the cops and tell them about the drugs in the school. Also, if any of this falls on Bill, then you will wake up one morning sans nuts.” Darren just looked forward at the back of the seat. He was watching his drug empire crumble because of his little brother. He knew a guy that would take the lot off his hands and even go into the school and get it, but he would lose money on the deal. All he could think about was Bill. How much money he was losing. How on that day Bill’s eyes started to glow red as if they were lit from behind. The car pulled up to his house. He owned a small bungalow near the Stow border. It was cheap and needed some work, but it was his. The drug life was good to him. His mother unlocked the door and tossed his bag inside. She said, “I just can’t look at you right now.” She walked toward the bus stop, and after a minute or two, a bus took her away.

Darren considered his options. With the sale of his inventory, he would have enough to live on for about a year. He could move his operation to another place? But that would have too many risks. He realized he would have to change. He looked at his phone. A painful search of the menu helped him find his friend Nathan. They called him Nat, and he was the guy when
you wanted a little nasty. Nat picked up Darren, and the two were off to a strip joint. Darren slipped a one-hundred-dollar bill into the hand of a server and was shown to a private room. It was dark and seemed to be backlit with a black light. A dancer came in. The black light lit her outfit and her hair up. She said, “you can call me J Fer. I can touch you, but you can’t touch me, but anything else is just fine.” Darren said, “I couldn’t touch you anyway.” He held up the casts as they glowed in the black light. She took off her top. Her nipples had rings in them that glowed in the black light. She spun around and started to grind on his lap. She asked, “what do I call you?”

Jennifer stood by the curtain that served as a wall and door to the room. The lights were on, and she was trying to cover herself with her hands as she stood staring at her stunned older brother. Darren still had an erection, but it was more reflex than reality. He had said his name, and she said she had a brother named Darren. He said, “Jennifer?” she got up and turned on the lights to see that the guy she was grinding on was her brother. She looked at the casts and asked, “what happened to you?” Darren asked, “what happened to me? Really? Is that what you are going to ask?” Jennifer shook her head as she said to him, “you can’t tell mom and dad.” She looked out the curtain then back to him. She said, “dad cut me off and with tuition
and everything I needed some cash. Fast.” She turned around and put her top on. Darren was smiling. An evil, malicious smile.

Jennifer sat in her parent’s living room with her mother, father, and brother Darren. She told her parents how Darren wasn’t really a bad guy and most of the product he was selling was legal. The school had banned them. She said, “the other was just sold to the teachers who are all adults.” Nancy just stared at Darren who was mouthing the words she was saying. Then Jennifer said, “and dad knew.” Nancy sat back. Frank seemed to disappear without leaving. Nancy said, “do you know this is my father’s house? He bought it and was going to give it to us until he found out about Senior. It’s why we still own it.” She leaned in and said, “so as far as it goes this is my house and Darren you aren’t welcome here.” She turned to Jennifer and asked, “just what does he have on you?” Darren said to Jennifer, “just take me home.” She said to him, “I’m not your bitch.” As soon as she said it, she realized he still had his a-bomb. She looked at him as he asked, “do you know that Jennifer is giving lap dances at the White Tail on State street?”

Darren was outside waiting for his Uber. He played his last hand and lost. All that was left was
going home and licking his wounds. Jennifer drove off about twenty minutes ago. When he had asked his question, and his mother slapped him. Then she looked at Jennifer and knew it was right. She had tried to explain why she was dancing. As she did Frank slowly tried to hide in the chair, he was in. Nancy then slapped her across the face. She said, “I raised you better. I raised you to have some fucking respect for yourself and us. As far as I am concerned I don’t have a daughter.” Jennifer left stunned and crying. Frank sat down and finished off a bottle of Wild Turkey. Darren called for an Uber and went outside.

Bill laid in his bed as his thoughts went randomly through his head about last week. His dad lost his job. He went back to school and became a drug dealer. He broke his brother’s arm. He got a girlfriend. His two best friends refuse to talk to him with one of them threatening him. His girlfriend kissed him. His dad stole all his silver and gold coins then his comics. Brenda stole the coins from their father when she left home. She then came back and gave him three-thousand dollars. His comic store closed then his friend the owner moved to Arizona. He gave him a box of comics and either by accident or on purpose gave him a gun. His girlfriend saw him naked. His mother tossed Darren out. He is no longer a drug dealer. Bill wondered if he should put drug dealer on a resume?
Then he found out that Jennifer was working as a dancer at a strip joint. He has a girlfriend that saw him naked then kissed him. After years of being told different, he knows that Grandpa owns the house. He was running again now with his girlfriend. He said to himself, “this was a wild week. I wonder what next week will bring?”

Darren sat in his living room with several bottles of pills and an open bottle of vodka with a straw. He was watching a DVD named Saving Ryan’s Privates, but the porn wasn’t helping. All he could think about was how his family abandoned him. How his little brother beat him. How his sister gave him a lap dance. He shivered over that one. From his right, he heard, “wow, it looks like you’re having a bad day.” Darren saw a three-foot-tall man in a white suit. He looked at the bottle he took his last pill from and said, “oh great I took the wrong pill.” Vot said, “well no my boy you took the right pill.” He jumped down onto his feet and walked over to Darren. He said, “my boy I have something that can help you become what you should have always have been. I can help make you rich.” Darren asked, “what’s the catch?” Vot said, “when I say and only when I say I want you to kill Bill.” Darren said, “oh, great my delusion is a Tarantino fan.”
Chapter Six

Bill made his way to school. It was unseasonably warm for that time of year. On his way, he saw Kenny Woods and Dean Jacks. The smell of smoke hit Bill before he saw the two. They were smoking something other than tobacco or at least with something added to it. They were in a hidden spot near the water. From what Bill could see they had a hold of a freshman. There was screaming and crying. Bill heard Dean say, “*fuck him with the handle. Do it.*” The two had found a broken broom handle along the side of the road. They decided to sodomize the first kid they could get a hold of. The boy was beaten and bloody with two front teeth missing. He pleaded, “*please no. Please help.*” Bill moved in on the two bullies. They seemed startled to see Bill. The first one let go of the boy and went for Bill. He swung a roundhouse punch that was slower than Darren’s punch. Bill caught it then pulling with his right hand he extended Dean’s arm out. With his left, he dislocated Dean’s arm at the shoulder. Then as Dean screamed, he punched him in the face. Dean’s nose broke with teeth shattering in his mouth. His eyes rolled back, and he was out. Bill looked back to see Kenny running down the path. He then turned to the boy who looked up at Bill then screamed and ran for the school.
Bill didn’t expect a thank you, but to scream then run? At the school, he saw the police and an ambulance. The boy was in the back. The boy saw Bill, but he didn’t acknowledge him. Bill figured they would be waiting for him at the door. They would arrest him for assault then he would go to jail without passing go or graduating. Instead, nothing happened. He would eventually hear a story. The boy told a story about a strange man in scarlet red armor stopping the two bullies from attacking him. The red armor was too much of a coincidence. Bill was wearing a red hoodie, and his backpack had an embroidered knight logo. He thought about just how easily he dispatched Dean. A man nearly twice his size, except at that moment he wasn’t larger.

The day went by like so many school days before blending into one another like so much white noise. After school, Bill noticed the police were just outside. He thought, “Ok I guess the boy realized it was me and the police were waiting to take me away after school.” Bill walked past the police and down the street. Behind him, one of the police cars started to follow. He made his way to the spot where the attack happened, but when he started to pass it the lights came on, and a voice said, “hey hold on kid.” He turned to see two officers stepping out of their car. Neither had their hands on their guns. One of them had
a notepad. The officer without the pad asked, “do you walk this way every day?” Bill said, “yes sir.” He fought the urge to say only on school days.” The second officer asked, “did you see anything this morning?” The first officer asked, “do you know this Kenny or Dean?” Bill explained that he only knew that they stood down here and bullied kids out of their lunch money or just slapped them around. The officer with the notepad took Bill’s information down. He then said, “if you see this Kenny don’t approach him. Call 911. Until we find him, we will post someone here to watch out for the students going to school.”

Back home he ran into Tina. She was dressed and ready to run. Bill told her about the two bullies but not that he was responsible. He wasn’t ready for her to ask, “was Dean ok?” He responded by saying, “he was about to sodomize that kid.” She countered with, “Dean is an asshole, but that doesn’t excuse attacking him.” Bill said, “I think his arm was broken and he lost some teeth. Other than that, he was well enough to be arrested.” Tina just nodded. Bill said, “I need to change if we are going running.” She said, “not a problem. Should I wait in the hall or are you just going to invite me into your room?” Bill didn’t know how to answer to that. She smiled then said, “I’m just kidding.” She then leaned in and kissed him. Bill fought the urge to say, “you can come into my room if
you want.” He said, “I’ll be right back.” He then spun around and ran into the door rather than opening it.

They ran to their usual spot then sat down and talked. They sat side by side talking about things and times they both shared as if they didn’t know the other was there. With every other word, they got closer together. Tina put her finger on his lips in a shushing gesture. She then kissed him again. She was close enough that Bill could feel her breasts against him. Her hand down on his thigh. Tina asked, “have you ever thought about it?” Bill tried to play it cool. He asked, “it?” She smiled then said, “you know. You and me. Our first time.” She kissed him again. This time her hand moved up his thigh. She backed her hand away when she found his manhood much further down than she expected. Bill jumped a little at the touch. His heart was racing. Tina looked to the right then the left. She then put his right hand on her left breast over the shirt. The nipple was hard and poking. She suddenly slipped back and said, “cops.” Bill turned to see a police car pull into the park. Suddenly as the separated the four-foot bench felt like it was twelve-feet long. Tina smiled and said, “I guess we will have to pick this up another time.” Bill said, “I am going to need a minute or two before I can get up.” She smiled then leaned in and kissed him. She then said, “that’s just too bad.” She then turned and ran.
Back home, Bill lay in his bed thinking about the bench and her touch. The thoughts of the day and the attack were just a distant echo. As he thought about her, he grew hard. From one corner of his room, Bill heard, “Jesus Bill you could put an eye out with that thing.” He jumped up while grabbing a pillow and putting it in front of himself. Brenda was sitting in a chair in the corner. She said, “I came here to see if you were alright not to see your baby maker.” Bill’s face turned red then he stammered out, “everything is alright. I am alright. How are you?” She smiled then asked, “so are you sticking it to the little girl or what?” Bill didn’t answer. She smiled then said, “yeah I didn’t think so.” Brenda looked at the door then back to Bill. They talked about Darren and then Jennifer. Brenda knew about Jennifer working as a dancer. After she left the house, Brenda had moved into Jennifer’s place. She said, “as it turns out some guys like their women short, so I started a shift at her club.” Bill said, “mom would be so proud.” She shook her head and said, “I don’t care what mom thinks. Where was she when uncle George was touching Jennifer and me?” She realized she hadn’t meant to say that. She got up and handed Bill an expanding envelope then slipped out the window. She said, “I wasn’t here, and you don’t know dick.”
The envelope was filled with hundred-dollar bills. There had to be ten thousand dollars. It was maybe half of what Bill’s coins were worth counting the gold coins. Altogether he had a little over twelve-thousand dollars. He hid the money then went back to his bed. He had enough money to escape his life, but where would he go. Bill knew that if he left he would have to make it for good and never come back. He would also have to leave Tina. Before that day in the park, Bill knew he would have been on the first bus the fuck out of here, but now he had someone worth staying for. He also knew that the longer it stayed, the greater the chance his father would find the money. He thought that just maybe Tina would hold on to the money. Although he sort of knew her for most of his life, Bill didn’t understand why he trusted her so much. They ran together and shared a few moments both safe and awkward, but they never went on a date or spent time together outside of the run. Yes, he was her boyfriend but what did that mean?

As he started to think about Tina again, he jumped up to make sure he was alone. He reopened his eyes to see he was back in the dream house. He also found Nadia on his arm. She was naked and caressing his manhood. He rolled over to her than on top of and into her. He could feel her gasp as he entered her. He wondered if this was what sex really felt like back in
the waking world. After that first couple of times with her, he learned to take his time and be gentle. He eased back and forth in a motion that made her shiver and moan. When he was done, he stayed inside her for what felt like an hour then fell to her side. She moved in and kissed his shoulder. She said, “I love you.” She said it, but she wasn’t sure she meant it. She felt like a prisoner in a posh cell. When he wasn’t there, she wasn’t allowed to leave her new home. The king, as well as his men, were not allowed to touch her anymore, but she wasn’t able to touch anyone else. She would wonder, “can you love someone you are forced to serve?”

Bill got out of bed and went over to a window. As he walked his clothes appeared on him. He was still in the body of the knight. Nadia came up behind him and held him close. She said, “we need you here.” Bill turned to face her and asked, “can this all be real?” Nadia said, “it’s as real as you want it to be.” Bill saw movement just outside. He went to the door and out. In his haste, he left the door open and Nadia standing there naked. Bill went out onto a street filled with parked cars. As he stood there a car went by. It was something from the 1950’s, but Bill didn’t know much about cars. The last time he was here people were afraid to touch the street but now they were driving. Bill could feel a change in the air. This place was
closer to something he knew back in the waking world. It also felt even more real to him. Parked on the curb was a scarlet motorcycle painted to look like armor. Bill somehow knew it was his.

Hendrick looked down from his tower at the house. He said, “so now we are buying the boy?” Vot said, “don’t be silly we already own the boy. We bought his soul on the first day he wore the suit and saved that kid. Besides, the boy was low hanging fruit. Damage people like him are easy to sway. No, the one we really want is the girl. This Tina. Her soul would help you keep your throne.” Hendrick turned to Vot. He asked, “what do you mean?” He walked over and picked up Vot by his shoulders and held him up. He screamed, “I am the king. The land chose me to rule.” Vot looked down then back into Hendrick’s eyes. Vot grew into his true deformed, ugly form and picked up Hendrick by his shoulders. He said, “don’t forget you serve the book but I am the book.” Vot tossed Hendrick across the room. Hendrick got to his feet while Vot changed back to his three-foot façade. Vot said, “nothing is set in stone. You must show you deserve to rule to him and then and only then you will be king.” Hendrick mouthed the word “Him.”
Hendrick heard the rumors, but he had never seen him. People said to never speak his name. He was supposedly taller than the tallest giant Cain with wings. Only the oldest of the knights could remember seeing him. Back when Adam and Eve broke the one rule and killed a holder of the book he had shown up and tossed them both into the void between the worlds. Vot was made to serve those who hold the book as well as the book itself. He worked for Cain and served as his right hand when he plotted against the will of the book as he tried to force the book to fail in getting the Gold Knight a girl named Kaylee. Hendrick was a Nazi war criminal that should have been sent to hell for what he did. He wondered if both he and Vot served him or was there another power greater or eviler than him. Vot had called the devil a bookkeeper with no real power but was that just a false face much like the one Vot wore?

Hendrick remembered how his former employer used fear and anger of a group of people to build a power base that led them to war. Somewhere in the woods was a knight that was punished but not killed. He was turned into the monster he was on the inside. Hendrick thought that he could use the fear of the Blue Knight to help keep the throne and how he could use this boy. What he wasn’t willing to do was trust the tiny imp. He also didn’t want his kingdom and
his fate to be hinged on this American boy. He turned to Vot and asked, “so how do I get this girl?” Vot smiled and said, “don’t worry about a thing I already have a plan in motion that will not only get us the girl but also the boy and another knight.” Hendrick asked, “who is this third knight?” Vot smiled and said, “he is the one I would have went after as my first knight. The boy has a brother that will fit in well here.” Hendrick just shook his head saying, “more Americans.”

Bill sat on the motorcycle feeling the power of the bike while realizing he had no idea how to ride. He had a bicycle, but his father sold it when his business started to fail. Overhead the sky turned dark, and a shadow covered the street. A light started at the horizon, and he followed it across the sky to the other side which was his bedroom. He looked around and found he was back in his bed. Someone was searching his room with a flashlight. He didn’t have to question who it was, he knew it was his father searching for more stuff to sell. His father turned around when Bill moved and charged over picking him up by the shirt collar. He said, “I know your bitch sister was here and she gave you some money. She gave you my money.” He let Bill go dropping him onto the headboard. Bill opened his eyes back up and found he was back on the street on the bike.
Bill woke back up and found he was on the floor with all his furniture gone. Even the door to his closet was gone. All he had was the clothing hanging in the closet and lying in piles on the floor. In the corner of the closet was the book. Bill picked up the book. He turned around and saw that the trim around the door was still in place. Before he could check the door opened, and his mother came in. She looked over the room then to the book in Bill’s hand. She said, “clean this up and put that away before your father finds it.” Bill did his best to hang what clothing could be hung then fold the rest and place them on a shelf. On that shelf underneath his socks and underwear, he put the book. His mother came back in with a stud finder, drill, an oval ring bolt and a hammock. She said, “you have to let me do this, or your father will explode.” Using the finder, she found two studs and drilled two holes screwing the bolts into the holes. She hung the hammock.

Bill got dressed and went to school. He only hoped that his mother would be there when he came home, or his father might just kill him for the hammock. His day went as usual, classes and lunch followed by more classes and finally the last bell of the day. Bill spent most of that day just staring at Tina.
From time to time she looked back at him and smiled. Out in the hallway he ran into Tina. She seemed to be waiting for him. Tina pulled him into a closet near the entrance. She pushed him up against the wall putting her hand behind his head then the other on his side leaning in and kissing him. Bill wasn’t sure where he should put his hands. He eventually put one hand on her hip then he tried to put the other up and around her under her arm, but halfway he touched her chest. Tina stopped kissing him. She had this look on her face that was half surprise half amused. She leaned in and let her clothed breasts touch his chest. The door opened, and the janitor took a mop out. He said, “I am going to tell the principal that I saw two students go into this closet in about two minutes so you might want to be somewhere else.”

All the way home Bill remembered the feel of her against him, her touch and warmth. He thought about what it would be like to be with her and not just close to her. A scream woke him out of his daydream. Bill was near the park, and the scream came from inside. He saw a girl on the ground and a man on top of her. She was clearly unconscious with a bloody lip and eye with a deep cut in her cheek. The man had the girl in a part of the park that was nearly invisible to anyone not knowing about this place. The man pulled a knife and cut the girl’s shirt off along with her bra. Bill
didn’t know what he was going to do he just knew this had to end. He jumped the fence, and the Scarlet Knight landed on the other side. Bill came to a stop just as the man was cutting the girl’s jeans away. He looked at the knight and said, “go cosplay somewhere else soy-boy before I teach you a lesson.” In a voice that was not his but one of a large deep-throated man Bill said, “I think the only lesson to be taught today is one of pain.”

Time slowed down, and Bill could see himself move in and kick upward long before this man could react. He felt his foot contact his jaw and the jaw breaking sending teeth flying. The man flew back striking his head on a tree about six feet away. The girl wasn’t moving. The man had put down a blanket next to a plastic bag and a shovel. Bill wrapped her in the blanket and not knowing if he could fly in the real world he looked up and took off. The flight was epic even though it was short. An orderly was talking to one of the attendants that help people at the door to the emergency room at Akron Summa City Hospital. They were talking about the Rubber Ducks AA baseball team when one of them saw the scarlet knight coming into land. Both men just froze in place. Bill said, “someone just attacked this girl in the park, and she needs help.” The orderly snapped out of his gaze and took the girl. Bill took the clipboard from the attendant
and wrote the location of the attacker. He noted that the man was wounded. Bill Stepped back and the scarlet knight flew off away from the stunned attendant just before a security guard arrived. The guard asked, “what just happened?” The attendant said, “I think all those years of tripping on acid just caught up with me.”

Bill came down landing in his backyard. Just as soon as he touched the ground, he changed back from the knight to himself. He checked the time and found it was after four o’clock. Bill exchanged his wallet with the one he had hidden and went inside. The television was on, and he could see his father in his usual chair. He had his head back and was breathing heavily. That was when he saw his mother’s head in his father’s lap. She was moving slowly up and down doing something that made Bill want to gag. On the television, the reporter was talking about a girl being attacked in Northeast Ohio but nothing about the knight. He made it to his room closing the door as quietly as possible. There was this wet smacking sound that helped Bill lose his appetite.

Bill found the hammock was still there with a pillow and blanket on the floor nearby. Bill tucked some clothing under the door to block the light so he
could study for the next day. He woke up in the living room of his house on the other side. Nadia was in the kitchen baking something that smelled like cinnamon and maybe cloves. She had on an apron and nothing else. The apron was big enough to cover her nipples and go down to her knees, but it showed a lot of cleavage as well as her backside. Bill stared at her ass wondering if the knight was real when he was awake, was she real when he was asleep. Nadia pulled something out of the oven in the shape of a loaf in a pan. She came over to Bill and went down on her knees in front of him. He started to protest, but she said, “I want to do this.” Bill pushed up with his arms so she could pull his pants and boxers off him. while Bill was uncomfortable with this his lower half was stiff and willing. The feeling was warm and more than just a little weird. He looked down at her wondering what she was getting out of this. After a few minutes of this Nadia got up and slid down on his lap. She noticed how with every encounter this boy seemed to get better and somehow bigger. He reminded her of the man she killed her two children so she could build a life with him way back in the day. When they were finished, Nadia stayed on him wondering if she was in fact in love with this boy.

On a giant curved piece of glass mounted to a wall much like a television, Vot and Hendrick watched
the two as they made love then lay together. Vot said, “yes, this will complicate things. I think we need to lose the girl.” Hendrick asked, “but I thought you wanted the girl?” Vot held up his hand blocking Nadia from his view saying, “no, I want the girl from the other side, not this murderer. If she didn’t have such a nice rack, I think she wouldn’t even be here. No, I want this Tina.” Hendrick stared at Nadia’s naked form as she lay on top of the equally naked Bill and asked, “how would we go about doing that?” Vot clicked his fingers, and the image went away with the glass showing the wall behind. He said, “one trope of the comics industry is that the good guy never gets to keep the girl or at least the first love, think Gwen Stacy and Spiderman.” Hendrick said, “I wouldn’t know. American comics were propaganda and not that available back in Germany.”

Vot walked over to the curved glass and tapped on a corner. The view of the stone behind the glass fell away and the movie The Amazing Spiderman Two started. Hendrick had never seen a color movie before and was surprised to see what a marvel of sights and sounds this medium had become. He asked, “is that what the world looks like now?” Vot said, “don’t lose focus. I wanted to show you my idea not some Hollywood fantasy of reality.” Hendrick said, “the story was shit with way too much going on, but this
The notion of the hero losing is nothing new I just don’t see how we get the boy to kill her.” Vot rolled his eyes and said, “don’t be stupid, we need a villain to come here and kill her.” Hendrick walked over to the window and looked out at the house. He asked, “and you know you can get the boy’s brother to do this?” Vot smiled and said, “Darren wants to be important, and I will make him just that.” Henrick shook his head saying, “I don’t know why I thought I could do all this without you.” Vot smiled showing every one of his teeth.

A girl of maybe fifteen or sixteen lay naked on Darren’s couch. She was passed out after getting fixed with the heroin Darren supplied. She paid for it with her body and Darren wanted to make sure he got his money’s worth. He didn’t know her name or her age all he knew was he got what he wanted, and now she had to go. Part of him wondered how much evidence he left on her just in case she was overdosing, and part of him wondered if she was so out of it that she might not realize he was going back for another go. He didn’t know her name or her real age. He did know she attended his high school and she might be in Bill’s class. He snickered at the thought of class and his brother. In the corner of his eye, he saw something move. The small man he saw a few days ago came out of the shadows. Vot asked Darren, “miss me?”
Darren didn’t say a word. Vot walked over to the girl evaluating her. He asked, “so Darren you like them dead? Vot picked up her hand then he let it drop. He said, “I can see the appeal, you know all the fun with none of the talking and with a fourteen-year-old there is a lot of talking.” Darren looked at the girl then he shrugged saying, “once you trade sex for drugs with someone underage then age becomes just a number.” Vot giggled then said, “yeah I think that number is twenty to thirty years in jail.” Vot waved his hand, and the body vanished. He said, “it was like she was never real.” Darren felt relieved that he wouldn’t have to dispose of the girl while Vot was just happy that he was able to say she wasn’t real because she was one of the many illusions Vot was able to create. She was only real at that moment. Vot tossed Darren a vial with a silver and white powder. He said, “this will make you the king of your own domain.”

Darren shook the vial, and the substance seemed to shimmer then glow. He asked, “and this stuff won’t be detectable by dog or sniffer?” Vot smiled and said, “the tests will come back as vitamin B or E.” Darren looked at the vial saying, “a high that won’t kill you but won’t let you forget just how much you liked the feeling. A drug that only I can sell and
everyone will want. It’s like printing money.” Vot smiled again, but his smile hid just how much he wanted to leave this guy. Darren asked, “so what’s my cut of this…….. what are we calling it………… stuff?” Vot said, “call it whatever you want, and all the money is yours. All you have to do is what we say when we say and as before that will include killing Bill.” Darren asked, “how do they take it?” Vot replied, “any way they want from snorting, needles, sprinkle on food, hell they can even just rub it into their skin for a high.” Darren made a mental note to never touch the product with bare hands. They made plans for his first shipment to be delivered in two days with the drug hitting the street a day later.

A knock at a door and the usual greetings had Darren into a house of one of his usual customers. Her name was Sandy, and she was addicted to Adderall. Darren showed her the vial and gave her the speech. He said, “this guy was talking about this stuff that was the most valuable crap in the ancient world that no one could recreate. That is why I am calling it Greek Fire because it’s going to burn forever.” He explained that a little mixed into a face cream or lotion would allow a user to dose without being noticed. He said, “but if you want the full effect then you snort or shoot.” Sandy put a little on her hand and moved the powder around with her finger. Almost immediately she found her whole
world come into focus. Her mind was clear, and she felt more alive than any of the times she did her usual poison. She took the rest and snorted right from her hand. Her clean and neat living room came into focus as she saw every imperfection, every grain of dust and every little thing that would have sent her over the edge on the other drug.

The bed shook as Darren plowed away at Sandy as she screamed with a feeling of ecstasy she had never felt before. Darren noted how the drug seemed to heighten Sandy’s ability to feel pleasure. He had slept with or in some cases paid for plenty of women and girls, but he had never made one make the noises this one was making as he was paid in full for the sample. When he finished, he told Sandy to go slow with the Greek Fire because it could be a few days before he can get some more. Sandy said, “call me when you do. I’ll pay you anything you want.” Darren looked at a picture of Sandy’s fifteen-year-old daughter. Without saying a word to her, Sandy said, “yes, I will do whatever is necessary even let that happen.” Darren knew how Sandy felt about her daughter Alexia and he now knew just how addictive this new drug was. Sandy had just sold her daughter after one hit. Like her mother, Alexia was pretty, but in the mind of Darren, there was a difference between not
knowing someone is underage and knowing, but still she was pretty.

Bill woke up and rolled out of the hammock onto the floor. He got dressed and ready for school. Outside in the living room, he found his parents still in the recliner naked and asleep with his mother on top of his father. He slipped out and exchanged his wallet with one that had money and was off to school. In homeroom, the principal announced a special assembly to talk about the recent violence happening around the school as well as the drug issue. At the end of the third period the teachers lined everyone up at the doors, and the students walked to the gym where they were seated by class in a boy, girl, boy, girl arrangement. Tina ended up sitting in front of Bill. In the center of the gym were the principal, two police officers, two K-9 officers with their dogs and three county sheriffs. One of the sheriffs took the microphone and said, “as we talk here now these members of the antidrug taskforce will be searching the school for drugs. There is a zero tolerance for any drug from the illegal to the legal, so if you have anything in your locker, you need to step forward now or face the consequences.”

Tina leaned back and said, “he just said they would bust anyone with drugs then he asked people to
turn themselves in making it easier for them to expel you.” A hand went up, “I have my anti-anxiety drugs in my locker.” Another hand went up, “my insulin in my locker in a cooler.” This went on for a few minutes. As people raised their hands, they were escorted to the floor then out the door. After they were gone the principal stated, “at the beginning of the year you were told that any drug had to come from the office and having a drug that was not approved was grounds for suspension or expulsion. Those students didn’t heed the word, so they are heading out of school. Zero tolerance applies to everyone here.” A door opened, and one of the officers came in and over to the principal. He pointed to a boy in the front row that Bill didn’t know. Everyone parted from him as the officer walked over. Bill couldn’t hear what was being said, but it became clear when the officer grew impatient and tossed the boy to the floor and cuffed him. He was the only legitimate arrest of the assembly by the end with several students busted for aspirin and Midol. Nothing was mentioned about the violence in or around the school. They would later find out that the boy was assigned a locker he never opened. Inside was the residue of a few drugs from marijuana to heroin. Bill recognized the number as one his brother had used to stash his inventory. Bill said to himself, “someone’s going to jail because of Darren.”
The assembly ended, and everyone was let go for the day. Bill walked out and saw the boy in the back of the police car. He could picture Darren laughing. If he told them about Darren, he would be arrested but if he says nothing this unknown boy could see the time Darren should be serving. A pair of arms came around him as Tina hugged him from behind. She asked, “it’s just not right. He won’t even get a fair hearing, it’s off to juvey.” Bill whispered to her, “that locker was one of Darren’s stash lockers.” Tina didn’t say anything. Bill said, “I know I shouldn’t be surprised that he lied I just didn’t know he was selling such hard crap.” Tina said, “Bill let me say this just once. I don’t want to know anything about that. It was hard for me to let go of the idea that you were helping him even though it wasn’t voluntarily so just don’t talk.” Bill said, “if I do nothing then an innocent boy goes to jail.” Tina pulled him in closer and whispered into his ear, “life isn’t black and white or fair and unfair. I mean think about it, they already did this search, so they should have already known about the locker.” Bill asked, “why would they assign a locker to someone they know has links to drugs?”

On the way home, Bill and Tina stopped at the park at their favorite spot. They sat on what they saw as their bench together. Bill wanted to talk, but Tina wanted a little more. They sat on the bench kissing as
someone watched them from the woods. Tina asked, “what did you want to say?” Bill tried to rack his brain on what had been so important until he remembered, “how about a movie?” Tina leaned back with a smirk on her face and asked, “you mean like a date?” Bill replied, “not like a date, an actual date with food and a movie.” She leaned back in and kissed him some more then she asked, “what have we been doing all this time? Are we not already dating?” Bill replied, “I think we should do all those things people do when they see each other, and that includes going out on dates.” Tina said, “that small place on Second Street is playing Thirty-Nine Steps and Rear Window, and I just love Hitchcock.” Bill had no idea who Hitchcock was, he just liked hearing Tina say love, so it was a date. Tina leaned back in and kissed him again putting her hand on his upper thigh touching more than his leg. She pulled her hand back, smiled and said, “see you tomorrow.”

Tina made her way to the edge of the park when someone blocked her path. It was Kenny, and he looked crazed. He struck Tina across the face and pulled her into the woods. He said, “I came here looking for cash only to find a cock tease. I think just maybe the little cock tease should be made to take a cock.” He held her by the neck with his left hand while the other probed her chest. She could feel his erection
up against her ass. Tina struggled, but he was near twice her size. She started to black out as he squeezed her neck. She knew that if she passed out, she was dead. From behind them, they heard someone say in a deep masculine baritone almost mechanical voice, “I don’t think the little lady is into you, Kenny.” Kenny spun them both around, and Tina saw the Scarlet Knight. She then felt as Kenny both lost his erection and his bladder. The Knight ground his right hand into his left palm saying, “oh look I just killed Kenny, I am such a bastard.”

Kenny let Tina go and tried to run, but Tina tripped him. She looked to the Knight and said, “don’t kill him.” Bill drew his sword and Kenny lost his bowels. The smell was strong and horrendous. The Knight said, “at the end of this path is a police car. Turn yourself in and live stay here or try to run away from the police and I will kill Kenny.” Kenny got up with a brown substance running down his leg. He didn’t say a word he just ran in the direction of the police car. The Knight turned to Tina and asked, “are you ok miss?” He caught himself before he said, Tina. She straightened her shirt and said, “I had that all under control but thanks for the assist.” Tina couldn’t see Bill smile under the faceplate of the armor. He said, “well then I’ll be off.” Tina asked, “what’s your name?” Bill didn’t answer he just jumped up and flew
off. Tina stood there watching this impossibility take to the air.

Darren disassembled a bed in his spare room. It was an old fashion four poster bed Darren bought thinking he would use it for tying his dates down. He pulled the box springs and the slats. In their place, he put the boxes of drugs that were just delivered. After he was finished, he put the mattress back and made the bed so that anyone seeing it would think it was just like any other bed and not the most valuable drug stash in the world. He left one box out so he could check out the finished containers. Inside vacuumed packed bags were five vials. Each one had a screw top lid. Darren took out two strips of five and called Sandy. He said, “it’s here if you are still interested and willing to pay.” A frantic voice on the other side of the line said, “we are on our way.” Darren realized she said we so just maybe Sandy was about to pimp her daughter out for a hit. A few minutes later and there was a knock at the door followed by a ring of the buzzer then another knock. Darren opened his door to find Sandy and a different girl. Sandy said, “Alexia is at cheerleading practice, but Sophie was home and more than willing.” Sophie was Alexia’s younger sister by maybe two years making her maybe thirteen. Darren said, “come on in ladies.”
Darren lay naked next to the young girl trying to find his center. He hadn’t thought everything through. He didn’t suspect the Sandy would have shared some of her stash with Sophie in the form of a body lotion that she used all over. When he touched her, he had a second hand high from all the Greek Fire in the lotion. The drug seemed to fuel his endurance, and just maybe he may have hurt her. When it was clear he went too far he gave her some more of the drug, and she seemed to quiet down. Darren remembered how the midget said that people can’t overdose on this drug, but right now Sophie was feeling no pain. He gave her mother ten vials of the drug, and he planned on giving Sophie five more now that he knows she as a taste for the high. He contemplated the idea that just maybe she has some friends in school that wouldn’t mind a little touchy for this new feel. Darren Smiled knowing he was about to be somebody.
Chapter Seven

Darren woke up in a field near a lake. On one side of the lake were old bleached deer bones. Off in the distance, there were mountains that Darren didn’t recognize. He walked up to the water. The water was so clear that he could see the bed as if the water wasn’t even there. A voice said, “the water reacts to the environment. Your presence makes the water pure.” Darren turned and saw Vot standing there with a bottle of what looked like wine. Vot said this was made from a special fruit from a special tree in a certain garden that humanity is barred from entering. Darren gave him a confused look. Vot realized that Darren must not know the story of Eden or at least the bible version. Vot said, “this bottle will give you the strength to fight and win against your brother.” Darren chuckled saying, “I can kick his ass any time I want.” Vot told him to, “follow me.”

Vot led him to the castle city to show just how much power Bill has as the scarlet knight and who he works for. Vot pointed at the tower in the center saying, “the spiral is the keep of the king, and he is a Nazi war criminal known for burning people alive. Billy boy isn’t a hero at all, he’s working for monsters doing monstrous things.” Darren said, “I’m a drug dealer.” Vot said, “you sell to people who have a
choice in what they do, he works for a man that burned living children.” Vot was taken aback by just how self-aware Darren was when it came to what he did and just maybe he wouldn’t have to play up the idea that he was the good guy and Bill was evil. Darren pulled the cork and took a drink. The wine tasted like a mix of cherries and oranges. Vot said, “come with me, and I will show you what should be.”

The two walked away from the city to an abandoned castle on the other side of the lake. Along the way, they saw a glint of blue in the woods. Vot said, “we’ll come to him soon, but for now let’s stay on topic.” The castle looked hundreds of years old and abandoned. Vot told Darren how when they first took on the medieval persona of knights and armor a divide happened between the good knights and the evil knights. He said, “the good knights under the rule of the silver made this castle while the evil knights followed the rule of the one known as Cain.” Darren asked, “the wrestler?” Vot said, “no, the firstborn of Adam and Eve…. it doesn’t matter. Adam and Eve are gone into the void and Cain is off somewhere else.” They walked into a courtyard and found a stone statue of a knight with silver armor. Darren took another drink only to find the flavor had changed to a mix of peaches and raspberries. He took another, and it tasted like pear juice. He looked into the bottle, and it was
empty. He turned it over, and nothing came out, but when he put it to his lips, he felt the liquid and tasted grapes. Darren looked up at the statue and the gleaming armor. As he looked away one of the statue’s eyes blinked.

Vot told him that when he was finished with the bottle, he should touch the statue. Darren asked, “where do I touch?” Vot said, “it doesn’t matter, any contact will transfer the mantle from him to you, and you will become the true king of this land.” Darren smiled over the idea of becoming the king. He said, “King Darren Warren Martin the first, I like the sound of that.” Vot liked how easy it was to corrupt this man. Vot said, “this will most likely split the land and cause a war between you and the Nazi King.” Darren said, “that don’t mean shit, we beat the Nazis in that second war whatever it was called, and we or I can do it again.” Darren took the last sip from the bottle. It tasted like apples and left a sweet taste in his mouth. He tossed the bottle to the ground, and it smashed into dust. Darren stepped into the long dried up water basin around the statue and touched the foot of the statue.

The silver broke apart from the statue and coalesced into a silver shimmer of dust. The statue fell away from Darren and shattered into dust. Vot
whispered, “enjoy hell.” Darren stepped out of the basin as water began to fill. From the center where the statue was standing a flood of water first burst out then down the column. All around then the castle came to life and slowly rebuilt itself. The silver shimmer came down and engulfed Darren encasing him in a silver armor fitting him like a glove and was more like Bill’s armor rather than the traditional style. On his head was a silver crown. A silver sword and a shield with a black symbol form. The symbol was a snake curled around an apple that faded into a silver relief. Darren drew his sword and held it up in the air. The sword felt both light and strong in his hand, and he could feel power or strength he had never felt before like he could do anything he wanted. He thought that it felt like a drug.

Hendrick asked Vot, “and he believed you?” Vot smiled and said, “this guy is an idiot. I think he would have believed me if I said he was going to be the new god of this land so yes I think he believes me.” They watched from the curved glass as the castle rebuilt itself. Hendrick turned his head away then back to the scene. He asked, “and you are backing me not him?” Vot said, “I would rather toss myself into the void and try and find Adam and Eve than serve him, but don’t be confused. I serve the book, not you.” Hendrick nodded and said, “will he have subjects?”
Vot replied, “I already have the Will searching for just the right kind of people to fill his castle. People that will follow him as well as the kind he will want to fuck.” Hendrick shook his head and asked, “why does it always come down to sex with these people?” Vot said, “simple minds think simply so as long as you don’t overthink then you can supply people like him with whatever will make him happy and when the time is right murderous.” One of the young chambermaids walked into the room with a bucket and a mop. She started to back out when Hendrick said, “stop.” Vot said, “well I’ll leave you to your fun.” Hendrick said to the maid, “it’s time you serviced your king.”

The sky darkened as Bill flew around his neighborhood. Off in the distance, he could see two men backing a van into an abandoned house’s garage. A light showed through a window. Bill came down to see what they were up to when he saw one of them with a sledgehammer an the other with a metal saw. There had been a rash of break-ins where the thieves stole the copper pipes. One man took to breaking walls and cabinets while the other cut the pipe out of the walls. The van was halfway out of the garage with the front showing. Bill jumped up in the air going as high as he could go then he stopped and fell to the earth building as much force as he could striking the van taking out the front all the way down breaking the axle.
He then jumped up to about ten feet in the air hovering over the driveway and waited. The sun was setting lighting Bill in an amber light that turned his armor dark. The two men came out and saw what was left of their van when they saw the Scarlet Knight.

Two police cars pulled into the driveway as the contents of the engine from the van ran down into the street. Bill let the two men run because he knew that the police could track them down using the van. Bill hid in a tree high enough that he didn’t think anyone would look to find someone and watched as they worked the scene then entered in the plate and vehicle identification number or VIN into the system. When the found the information, the police were on their way to the suspects home. Bill weighed the pros and cons of letting the police handle this or following them just in case something goes wrong. He decided to follow and not leave their capture to chance. The car pulled up to a large fenced-in junkyard. Bill could see that the two men had three others and they were arming for war. Another patrol car pulled up making a total of three police against five men armed with AK-47 variants and a Barrett 50-caliber sniper rifle. The man with the Barrett took aim at one of the police officers and fired.
In the split second after the shot went off, Bill landed with his shield out on the inside of the fence blocking the round. The armor-piercing tracer round shattered on Bill’s shield only leaving a burned mark. The police took cover and called in the shots fired. One officer asked, “holy shit did you just see that?” Another said, “no, and you didn’t see that either.” The five men opened fire on Bill with no effect as rounds just bounced off his armor. Bill pulled his sword and jumped into the air. The Police saw his arc in the air as he came down and cut the Barrett in half along the breach. The others stopped firing. He pulled the sword out of the tires the men were using as cover, and some of the tires flew away. The man using the Barrett fell backward, and Bill put the point of his sword on the man’s throat. The Scarlet Knight said, “guns down, arms up or I cut you down.” The place where the sword touched his throat started to well with blood. About ten minutes later a SWAT team raided the yard and found five men stripped down to their underwear on their knees with their hands on their heads and their guns and clothes piled nearby.

Bill landed and walked his way back home as himself with the armor vanishing as he touched down. He was covered in sweat and feeling rundown. He felt good like he just ran ten miles breaking his record for distance by a couple of miles. He made it to his room
and found a simple twin bed with a set of sheets, a pillow, and an old blanket. There was a note on the bed, “I bought this at the Goodwill and told your father that it is to stay.” Bill stripped off his clothes and climbed into his bed. The bed wasn’t as comfortable as his old bed, but it didn’t sway when the heat came on, and he might not fall out in the middle of the night. He closed his eyes and opened them on the other side where he found Nadia waiting for him. She had her hair up in a braid like Tina. She was also topless and straddling him. Bill felt himself rise to the occasion while wondering if this was right and was he cheating on Tina. Soon he lost all thought of Tina or right and wrong and just focused on the woman in his lap riding him. The sex felt good even as his thoughts turned back to the idea he was using this woman. Nadia felt safe whenever Bill was around, and she didn’t mind sleeping with this boy, in fact, with every trip back he stayed as the older form of the knight rather than the teenager he really was.

Darren woke and saw the girl was still there asleep holding on to his arm. He smiled over the idea he finally found some real revenge. Sandy has a sister named Olivia who went to school with him. He and her dated for a few weeks until he realized he wasn’t going to get any from her. When he broke it off with her, she went around telling people he was gay then when more
than one girl said she was wrong, she said he was bad in bed. At one point in her telling, she would hold up her little finger and say this is bigger than him. He thought that helping Sandy get strung out on drugs was revenge, but now that he slept with her niece he had his true revenge. A flash went off in the room, then another. A voice said, “I think just maybe this will be worth some change.” Another voice said, “or twenty to thirty years in jail.” Darren saw his brother Jason with a phone and Jason’s twin Jennifer was in a chair smirking.

Darren sat up not even trying to cover himself. The girl rolled over and went back to sleep. Darren said, “I’m working on the biggest deal of my life, so I can’t handle your crap right now so delete the pics or die.” Jason said, “all we want is a little taste and maybe a hit or two. I think that would be well worth your time.” Jennifer said, “a little time and cash now or a lot of time and ass play in prison later.” Darren looked over at the sleeping drugged girl and said, “go, and I won’t kill you.” Jason walked over to Darren and put his finger in his chest saying, “look perv we are talking so shut the fuck up.” Darren saw something shimmer next to him. He pulled a large dagger, and without warning, he drove it into Jason’s throat. The blade went from one side to the other nearly decapitating him. Darren pulled another dagger.
Jennifer put up her hands and said, “this wasn’t my idea, and I saw nothing.” She looked at her dead brother on the floor then back to the brother that killed him and said, “I can help you clean this up and hide the body.” From a corner of the room a voice said, “no, that’s my job little missy.” Vot walked out into the light. Darren flipped the knife in the air so that the blade was in his hand and the handle was out, then he threw it at Jennifer burying the blade in her chest right about where her heart was.

Vot looked at the sleeping girl then the two dead bodies on the floor. He asked, “what is it with everyone wanting to kill their siblings?” Darren asked him if he could help. Vot said, “yes, but don’t forget what I am about to tell you. I serve a greater power not you, and if pushed I will always side with that power.” He didn’t want this man to know about the book just in case he might go looking for it in Bill’s room. Vot waved his hand, and the bodies and all the blood vanished. Vot said, “don’t be surprised or....... I don’t know.......... act surprised when the twin’s absence is noticed.” Darren said, “I doubt that anyone will miss them.” Vot quickly replied, “well you sure didn’t.” Vot said, “well time for me to go.” Darren rolled the girl over and said, “yes I think it’s time.” Vot stood by as Darren took advantage of the sleeping drugged girl for a moment until the sight of human copulation made
him sick. As he left, he knew he found a sort of soul mate for the Blue Knight.

**The Blue Knight.**

William sat next to his dying fire after finishing off the deer he had just killed and cooked. It had been so many months since he was changed into this hideous thing that he had a hard time remembering what life was like before he became a monster. Vot told him he became on the outside the monster he was on the inside and William thought he might be right. Even before he became a knight or even before the book, he wasn’t what some would call a good guy. Long before all this, he was a teacher. He had grown jaded in his profession and found he was attracted to some of his younger students. Thoughts of violating them turned to thoughts of destroying them body and soul, but he never acted on any of his fantasies. William had taken to following students when he was spotted, and he ducked into an old bookstore where he came face to face with the Deceiver and the book. The Deceiver was a servant of the book who was once a man that was sent to hell for his sins. Along with Vot, The Deceiver looked for souls that would fit into the books narrative and the other world.
As the Blue Knight, William would go to known places where the homeless runaways congregated and searched for his playthings. He would mostly abduct young girls. On the first girl, he met the voice of temptation known as Vot who helped him dispose of the first body as well as devise a way to dispose of future bodies. After his ninth victim, the Deceiver appeared like an angel who told him that he was doing god’s work saving their souls from hell. It was during this time that a former student he had an affair with told him about her new job and her new product. She was going by the name Sequoia and was working as a pimp in a drug house. She had just bought a new girl from a sweatshop. She was born in China, and her name was Ying. He paid Sequoia to have his way with her, but she wouldn’t sell her to him so he could save her soul. A short time later the house was raided, and Sequoia was dead. When the little girl wasn’t found William knew he was in trouble, so he packed his bags and went on the road looking for a new place to save souls.

William found a place in the desert where he could take children as they crossed the border with no foreseeable consequences until she walked into his class. It was the beginning of the new school year in the sleepy little town known as New Kent, and William was having his first classes of the week. At
first, he didn’t recognize her, and she didn’t recognize him. At the end of the class, the young girl named Ying came up to him and kicked him in the genitals. After a meeting with the principal and the young woman who was acting as her guardian, William decided to get away before she talks. He found himself teaching at a prep school in Northern California. There he built a house that helped him with his saving souls. The house was built with a special drain and industrial grinder for disposing of his special playthings. He also built a closed-circuit camera system to record his work saving souls.

William had ordered a special toy for himself and his playthings. An extra small sex swing with handcuffs was on its way. He worked hard to keep his home life away from his work, and his work was starting to pay off with a sort of standing within the tiny community. None of the other teachers or the public knew about the knight or how he spent his nights raping and murdering young girls. A knock at the door and a signature gave him the package that contained the swing along with a special gift of a set of silk straps for tying the person to the swing. With the swing in place, he made plans to find a new toy and play with it for a while. While he would never risk taking from his own class, he would daydream about every one of them in his swing or in the special bed or
tub as he played. William didn’t hear the door open, and he didn’t hear the two women walk up behind him with guns and tasers. Staring at the swing, William unzipped his fly and started to play with himself when one of the women hit him with the taser.

William woke up to find himself cuffed and tied to the small swing. He was naked with his legs tied spread apart to expose his genitals. The swing slowly turned around to where he could see the women were the young Chinese girl named Ying and her guardian a woman named Alice who wasn’t that much older than Ying. They both had guns with suppressors and Alice had a taser. He watched as the two girls searched the basement for his recordings. Alice found a secret door and the system that held his files. Ying turned to William and said, “Hello John.” She then shot him in the knee. The round bounced off his kneecap and struck him in the stomach. He knew his time was up. In the corner of the room, he could see Vot smiling. Ying gently took hold of his penis. Even with all hope lost he still grew hard in her hand. Ying smiled then a metallic sound as she opened a folding knife and butterflied his penis down the shaft. The blood flowed as William screamed with a ball gag in his mouth in a soundproof room. Eventually, the two girls shot him in the head.
William woke to find himself on the other side with the knights. He was happy to see he was still the handsome Blue Knight and not the man he left behind. After a while, he learned that not being the holder of the book makes you a servant to the person who does. The Blue Knight wanted not only the power he had before he wanted to control everything from the events on this side to who gets recruited. He wanted to take Vol’s job. It didn’t matter that he would be a slave to the whims of the book and the book holder he thought he could use this power to find what this side was missing. He missed his playthings. The new Queen was the Gold Knight a young girl who was reshaping this Hell to reflect something bigger. William could see that Vol was building a future for this place around this girl and not him as he was promised. While in the castle city he saw a young boy and made his move only to find he had to have permission before he used someone that belonged to the Queen. For his punishment, he was brought back deformed with his armor cut in strips embedded in his skin. He found himself unwelcome among the townsfolk. Then the Queen’s rule ended and what looked like the end of this nightmare for him until it stopped, and he was trapped in this hell forever.
Vot approached William in the woods. He was in a black judge’s robe and a powdered wig. In his hand was a small orangish card. William went for his sword, but it was missing in its place was a long stick. Vot said, “it doesn’t have to be like that. I think just maybe we can dial back what happened to you and just maybe you can rule this land just like I promised.” William tried to speak, but all that came out was, “liar.......... bad.” Vot smiled then he said, “well, yeah you got me you will never be king, but you can go back to be the Blue Knight as serve at the hand of a king who likes your kind of playthings.” Vot waved his hands, and an image of Darren with the young girl came up. William stared at the image of the young naked girl and groaned over the loss of his virility. He turned back to Vot who was pointing at the ground. Vot said, “I will do this if you beg for my favor.”

Darren watched as Sandy picked up Sophie from his driveway. He could see Sandy searching her daughter and finding the Greek Fire he gave her. The two argued until Sandy struck her daughter. Sophie got out of the car with a cut lip and a reddening eye and ran away from the house and car. Sandy broke open one of the vials and snorted the drug straight down. From behind him, Vot said, “OK then just maybe we should cut the drug a little. This level of addiction might just turn ugly.” Darren said, “while this was fun I
think I need to take this serious or risk losing control or worse.” Vot asked, “so what’s your plan?” Darren told him that he first wanted the product out of his house, then he needed a sales force of pushers and providers to find and make new addicts for his product. Darren said, “you should take the product back so you can cut it with something that will keep us under the radar of the local law as well as the DEA.” Darren turned to Vot to see the little man in a black suit with white pinstripes and a white fedora. He was in black wingtips with white spats and a lit cigar dangling from his lip. In an Edward G. Robinson impersonation, Vot said, “yeah see, I’ll take care of the manpower and the cut. All you got to do see is find a good hole for us to fill see, yeah.”

Darren went into the bedroom with the stash and found all the drugs were gone. He sat down at his computer and did a search for a building with a warehouse, office, and security. Off route 18 in Fairlawn, he found a building that was a good size for their operation with security that could be upgraded as the cash rolled in. He had enough on him to buy the building and do some basic work, but it would tap his reserves. He would need to go into operations quickly or starve. He made a call and arranged to see the building and make an offer. The seller asked, “so what kind of business are you?” Darren replied, “the kind
“that’s none of yours.” Darren said, “look you are asking one-hundred and ninety thousand dollars for the property. I am offering one-hundred and sixty-three. I know you don't have any other offers and you won't be getting another offer anytime soon. The area is a dead zone with nothing around it.”

A man sat curled in a ball in the corner of a dark room. His arms and legs were cut up with some of the cuts going down to the bone. Jack “Jacks” Ford was a drug dealer in his life and was now a plaything of a demon in hell. The demon spent the last twenty years eating on the man again and again only to have his wounds heal, and his hell start all over again. Jacks sold mostly Heroin. He didn’t care what happened to his customers even as they died from his rat poison-laced drug. In his life, he was able to rationalize his actions and finally concluded that there was no heaven or hell until he died and found the truth was waiting for him. His cuts were deep, and the demon was nearby waiting for him to stop bleeding so he could restart the process again. Then the demon’s breath stopped, and the pain went away. Jacks looked around and saw he was no longer in the room, he was in an alley. A voice came from behind him, “now that you have had a taste of hell maybe you would like a taste of slavery with a hint of freedom.”
Darren met with the owner at the building. There was a ten-foot barbed-wire-topped fence around the building, but there was still a fair amount of graffiti on the walls. Darren walked the fence and found a hole where the artists found their way in. The owner told him it was “as is” unless he wanted to pay more. Darren said he would pay an extra nine-thousand for immediate occupancy. The owner countered with the full price when Darren said, “take what I’m offering or don’t. I won’t pay more for this crap hole.” The owner took the check and gave him a set of keys. Darren unlocked the gate then went to the main door and went to unlock it only to find the door was busted open. A feeling came over him, then a shimmer of silver. He walked into the building as the silver knight. Inside he found a message spray-painted on the wall saying, “Heroin is heaven, Cocaine is hell and meth is death.”

A man stumbled into the lobby. He had to be in his late sixties to early seventies covered in dirt with a smell that couldn’t be described. He saw Darren and smiled saying, “holy shit it’s Lancelot Link Secret Chimp.” Another man came out wearing pink women’s pajamas with visible piss and shit stains on them. He saw Darren and pulled a box knife. Darren pulled a dagger with his left hand with a shimmer on his right
hand. The second man charged. Darren quickly shifted to the right burying the dagger in the man’s chest as he tried to stab through the armor. The man fell to the floor. The shimmer around Darren’s hand coalesced to a silver Bagua Broadsword. Darren let the man go to his knees then he brought the sword around and cut the man’s head, right shoulder and arm off in one swing. The first man said, “hey man, that’s not cool.” A shimmer came around Darren as the armor vanished. He tossed the first man a vial of the drug and said, “when this kicks in, clear this building. If you do, then you will have a job with me.”

Darren made his way home and went inside. He fell into his couch and came up on the other side in his castle which was alive with activity. He stood up, and everyone around him stopped and went to their knees. Darren walked over to a window and saw that the castle had finished rebuilding and was filled with people men and women mostly standing around talking. From behind him, Vot said, “this is your workforce. Every one of them was a dealer with experience in selling while not getting caught. Just say the word, and they will go out and sell.” Darren turned to see Vot with a man in navy-blue slacks, a light blue shirt, and a navy-blue tie. William went to his knees as Vot instructed him to do. Vot said, “this is William the Blue Knight. He will act as your second here while you
are away. His job will be to protect your castle so just think of him as security or a bouncer.” Vot laughed on the word bouncer. Darren said, “stand up and assemble my army. I want to talk to them before I send them out.” Darren looked around at all the people still on their knees. He said, “King Darren Martin.” He turned and left the room.

Outside in the courtyard, the hustle and bustle of people stopped as they went to their knees. Darren put his hands up and said, “stop. As my people on the street, you won’t ever have to take a knee to me. Just do your jobs and earn your place in my kingdom.” Vot offered to introduce each one of his handpicked dealers he took from hell, but Darren said, “I don’t care what their names are as long as they sell.” A man in blue jeans and a Redwings jersey walked over. Vot said, “this is Jacks. He will act like your head dealer.” Jacks said, “I have over twenty years of experience dealing smack, and with the pigs, so I can get the job done.” Darren said, “then do it. I want people on the street with sales by tonight.” Darren turned to Vot and asked, “just how are they going to get to the real world and sell?” Vot giggled then he said, “oh, didn’t I mention it? This is your ghost army, and as ghosts, they can travel back and forth for as long as I allow it.”
Darren felt something cold push at his chest. He woke to find a barrel of a shotgun pointed at his chest about where his heart was. At the other end of the gun was Sandy. She looked beyond crazed. He could hear someone searching his bedroom knowing it was Sophie. Sandy asked, “where is it you son of a fucking bitch.” In a move that was impossibly quick, Darren took the gun away from Sandy. He stood up and bent the gun in half. Then in one fluid motion, he turned to the silver knight as he took Sandy by the face and picked her up. He said, “Oh Sandy how could you treat me this way.” He could feel her jaw flex then break and fracture in his hands. He put his other hand on the back of her head and turned her head around until he could feel the snap and she stopped fighting. Her bowels let loose as Darren let her go. In the doorway to his room, he saw Sophie. She looked like she was caught between the need to scream and the need for the drug. Darren said, “William.” The blue knight appeared. Darren said, “this is Sophie, she is thirteen and a good time, but I want something new so you can have her. Do with her what you want as long as she is never found.” William walked over to Sophie and took her by her shoulders. He said, “don’t worry my little plaything, you will only wish you were dead.” They vanished along with Sandy’s body. Darren sat back down and went to sleep. Unlike Bill, Darren could dream.
Darren woke up, took a shower and got dressed. He drove over to the building he just bought to see if the junkie had done his job. The building looked the same except that the fence was repaired, and plastic strips were woven in hiding the view from the street. A man opened the door and came out. He was in dark gray slacks, a white button-down shirt with a thin black tie. His long white hair was tied back into a ponytail. It was the old junkie from yesterday. He had cleaned himself up and looked more like an aging hippy clerk rather than a near dead addict. The man walked over to Darren and put his hand out. He put his hand back down when Darren didn’t take it. He said, “everyone that isn’t worth your time is gone, and we are ready for you.” Darren walked by him and into the building to find it was clean and set up with furniture and computers. The man pointed to a short Chinese man in a yellow button-down shirt and a rust colored pair of slacks. He said, “that’s Philly, he once owned a computer repair and sales company before he found the joys of the poppy. He had the computers and phones.” Darren turned to the man and asked, “and you are?”

Hershel Kolavitch was on his second tour of duty at a firebase in the middle of nowhere Vietnam. It
had been weeks since they had anyone go by the camp. The locals stayed away after two women were attacked. Hersh was months away from going home. He managed to stay clean while the others smoked and took every kind of drug they could find. That day he was cleaning his rifle. The jungle was harsh on the Browning Automatic Rifle or BAR he carried. He heard something whiz by then the world lit up, and everything bounced. He woke up as people ran around shooting into the jungle. Everything hurt. Two years later he found himself in the house owned by a friend as his friend showed him how to fix a needle or spike and how to inject heroin. He was cut off from the pain medication he was convinced he needed. The needle was the first of what would be many that took him from a clerk to a homeless man living in an abandoned building in Fairlawn. Hersh told Darren that he took the powder and woke up looking around and seeing what he was living in and what he could do to fix his life. He had evenly divided the rest of the drug among the ones that could be useful and tossed out the rest. Together they cleaned and set up the offices and warehouse for sales and distribution.

On a street corner near Yankee Stadium Jacks walked out into a world he hadn’t seen since the late 1980’s. He had several samples of the drug and a need for a hot dog. The world had changed in the time he
was dead, and New York was so much cleaner than he could ever remember. He saw a girl with turquoise hair and wires going from her ears to a black rectangle in her hand. He had watched her buy some pills off what had to be the worst dealer he had ever seen. He walked over and slipped her a packet of the new form of the drug now in pill form. He said, “when you are ready for the next level then come and find me.” He distributed all the samples as well as to hotdogs and some sales. Across the continent from Florida to Texas up to Canada Greek Fire was spreading and converting people into customers.

In a restaurant in Silver Springs, Ohio Bill sat across from Tina and stared at her head. Her long braid was gone replaced by a short pixie style haircut similar to Audre Hepburn or Anne Hathaway. She had taken her hair down and found it was down below her ass, so she was ready to donate it to a charity that collects human hair for wigs. The look changed her face making her look her age. Bill had to bribe the waitstaff to let them dine there, but he wanted this their first date to be meaningful. He wore a pair of black slacks with a white-button-down shirt and a scarlet tie. Tina was in a scarlet dress with iridescent beads across the front. Neither of them was talking about the other day with Kenny and the scarlet knight. Bill saw one of the waiters slip a small baggie with two silver pills to a
customer. Their usual banter and flirting were replaced by awkward silence and a feeling that they didn’t belong there. Tina eventually leaned over and said, ‘let’s get out of here.”

Outside in the car, Bill rented for this date they drove to a place they knew they could be alone and started to make out. They slipped into the back where Tina pulled Bill’s tie off him then she unbuttoned his shirt. She couldn’t get over just how tone Bill had become in such a short time. They continued to kiss until Tina realized her zipper was stuck and she was stuck in the dress. Taking it off would mean breaking the zipper which was something she couldn’t explain to her mother. With that, the night ended, and Bill drove her home. Bill made his way back to his house where he stripped down to his boxers and got into bed. He looked up at the ceiling and thought about taking things into his own hands or going and seeing Nadia when a tap at his window brought him back. He looked out and saw Tina. Opening the window, he helped her into his room. Tina was in a hoodie and yoga pants. She looked down at his boxers then finding her courage she opened and took the hoodie off with nothing underneath. She then slipped off her shoes and yoga pants. Bill just stood there stunned by the turn of events. Tina took the initiative and pulled his boxers
down then pushed him to the bed. She said to him, “I have thought about doing this for four years.”
Chapter Eight

Bill lay naked next to Tina in his bed. He stared down at her and himself wondering what was real and what was fake. He ran what just happened in his mind. The feel of Tina on top of him, how much what they just did felt like what he and Nadia do, and if they are the same then are both realities real. He could smell her on his skin and next to him. Bill closed his eyes and found himself in bed next to Nadia. Like in his own reality he was naked with her in bed. If both were real, he knew he would have to break it off with one of them or accept being the kind of guy who would string two girls along. Nadia said, “I only feel safe when you are here.” She pulled off the blanket covering her and Bill and got on top of him. Bill ran his hands up her thighs as they started to make love. With every thrust, Nadia became Tina then back again. He woke up and found Tina on top of him. She fell to his side and kissed his cheek.

Jacks walked to a corner and found a place to lean waiting for the inevitable return of the girl from the day before. As soon as he leaned back against the wall, a car door opened and she got out. Her hair was now a pale pink with white tips. He wasn’t surprised to see her; the drug was addictive from the first taste but had none of the debilitating effects or at least none that
are evident. Then the other three doors opened, and three other people got out. Another girl with pink hair, a man with enough tattoos and piercings to make him a walking advertisement for a tattoo parlor and what he thought was another man in plaid and tattoos until he saw he had breasts. Jacks felt for the automatic in his waistband in the back. He had nothing to worry about the four bought enough drugs not only for themselves but to either sell or share. When Jacks got back to the other side, he learned that most of his dealers had similar sales. At the end of the first day, Jacks brought a sales report and seven-million-dollars to the throne room of King Darren.

Darren cleared the room and stared at the money. He could picture houses, cars, and women then he realized he had no way to put any of this in the bank. If the money comes in like this, then he will have millions to billions of dollars he can’t spend. A knock at a door and a young woman came into the chamber. She was younger than him but not as young as Sophie. She was wearing a simple cotton dress with a scarf over her head holding her long blonde hair in place. She had an open top basket with a bottle of wine, cheese and a loaf of bread. She said, “Sir William said you might like me to bring you something you would like.” Darren waved her over and took the basket away from her. He then lightly took her by the hands and
pulled them away from her front so he could look at her. Darren said, “How much do you want to serve your king.” He spread his legs with a visible erection. The girl pulled her hands away from Darren and put one to her chest and the other behind her. She unfastened her dress and let it fall to the floor. She then took the scarf off. Now naked she went to her knees and bowed her head saying, “I serve the king in all things.”

Bill watched as Tina put on one of his shirts. She came back over to the bed and sat down next to Bill saying, “I have to get home before someone notices I’m gone.” She then leaned in and kissed him. She got back up and pulled her yoga pants on. She slipped on her shoes then her hoodie and was out the window into the early morning hours. A voice came from the dark, “that’s something I don’t think I will ever be able to un-see.” A light came on, and Bill saw his sister Brenda. She was sitting in a folding chair across from the bed. Bill asked, “just how long have you been there?” She smiled then said, “well if you would have turned on your lights when you let her in then just maybe this conversation would have happened then. I do have to say that if you weren’t my brother, I would have found that some pretty good porn.” Bill looked at the door then back to Brenda. She asked, “have you seen Jenny or J because neither of
them has been around for about a day and Jenny missed two shifts.” Bill just shook his head no, and Brenda got up and left. On the way out she said, “I hope she makes you happy because you deserve some happiness.”

Brenda went back to the apartment she shared with her sister Jennifer and slept until her shift was about to start. She woke up and took a long shower shaving every part that would be exposed. Part of her liked the dancing with all the teasing and flirting that came with it while another part hated how dirty it all felt. She had her dreams just like anyone else. She had even thought about pre-med or nursing school. She had the grades for it, and she was supposed to have the money until she found out that her father closed her saving’s account to pay off a bill for his shop. At the time she was a minor and needed a parent on the account. She watched as student loans turned Jennifer into a stripper to pay for school. She got to the club and dressed in her favorite outfit a silver minidress with glitter. Before she could take the stage, the manager said there was a request for a private dance with her, and he paid six hundred dollars. The manager said, “this guy is cash heavy so do whatever he wants, and we will capture it.” The Lapdance booths had secret cameras for people who had more money than brains. The room was lit with a black light that gave
the man an unearthly appearance. He had tattoos that only showed up in such light. The man touched a switch, and the song “all apologies” from Nirvana came on. It was a strange song to dance to, but Brenda was ready for the weird. She slipped out of the dress and showed a small thong and two silver pasties. She got into his lap only to find he was naked below the waist. She whispered, “oh honey no that will cost you extra.” Jacks put his hand on her thigh and said, “I think I’m good for it.”

Without another word Jacks struck Brenda in the face once then again. The blows nearly knocked her out. Jack’s got up and forced her down to her knees then across the bench. He ripped the thong off her. Brenda felt like she was floating. She tried to say, “why are you doing this?” Jacks said, “not by choice. I was told to tell you to stop looking for Jennifer and to teach you a lesson in betrayal. You don’t cross Darren.” He then penetrated her from behind as violently as he could. Brenda could feel something ripping and breaking inside her. Jacks took her head and bashed it into the bench. She woke to a pounding at the door just before it broke open. One of the bouncers picked her up, and he didn’t put her down until they were at the hospital. When the police and the manager reviewed the video, the man was gone. They
could see her as she reacted to something then as she was tossed to the bench and raped, but he was gone.

She woke to find herself in the hospital surrounded by the police, doctors and nursing staff. She knew almost everyone on the staff at the hospital. In a way, she grew up here with her mother working as a nurse here all her life. The one person she didn’t see was her mother. They told her she would need some surgeries and even then, she could lose her right eye. Brenda couldn’t believe her own brother would send such a man. She asked, “how could he even afford to have such a man working for him?” The man broke her phone so calling anyone wasn’t possible. Over the next couple of hours, people came in and out including the club’s manager who said she was covered under their healthcare insurance and everything was paid. Her last visitor of the night was her mother. She came in and did her job when she stopped next to the bed. She said to her, “I would feel sorry for you but, little lady this is what happens to bad girls doing bad things. I mean honestly Brenda its like you were asking for this to happen.” She started for the door when she stopped and said, “don’t think you are coming to my house after you get out. My house is for my family and not whores.”
Tina was attending a family function so she couldn’t come over until later. Bill liked how she said later with a little more behind her words. Bill took to the sky to find some trouble only to find that the crime on every corner concept from the comics was more fantasy than reality. It was nearly impossible to stumble across a crime while it was happening. He traveled around until midnight before he decided to go home. On the way, he flew over a closed convenience store. The owner had a heart attack while being robbed at gunpoint. His family closed the store rather than staffing it until he was ready to come back. Parked in front of the store was a tow-truck with a man standing on the outside near the window with a chain. From what Bill could see, they were lined up with the ATM machine on the inside of the store. Another man was near the door with what looked like a large hammer-shaped crowbar.

Bill came down on the other side of the building and walked around. He turned the corner knowing they would see him, but no one reacted to his presence. Bill looked at a window and saw no reflection. He could look down and see himself, but no one else could see him. The man turned and nodded to the man at the door turning the engine on and putting the truck into gear. Bill grabbed an old hubcap from a wall and stood behind the truck. Dave Gnat stood by.
waiting to tie the chains around the ATM. He knew he would only have a few minutes before the alarm could send the police, but this was like free money. As he stood there waiting for Sean who was behind the wheel to go and Daryl at the door something strange happened. A hubcap came off the wall and floated to a point behind the truck. Dave was still a little high from their earlier score. The price of heroin was going down because of this new drug. A voice came out of nowhere in a thunderous booming tone like the voice of God, “Drop the chain and run. Go home and just maybe you can stay out of jail.” The chain which was already heavy for the rail-thin heroin addict felt like it added fifty pounds to its weight. He Dropped the chain onto his foot and ran with a limp.

Sean put the accelerator down with the truck in gear to take the window out and take the ATM. The tires squealed, but the truck went nowhere. Sean turned to Daryl at the door, but he was laying on the ground near the door with what looked like a hubcap near his head and a laceration across his scalp. He turned to Dave, but Dave was gone. Behind the truck, he could see two glowing red eyes. He hit the breaks and put the truck into park then turned the engine off. Next to him was a nickel-plated 357 magnum loaded with Xtreme Penetrator Rounds that cavitate in the wound turning a bad hit into a fatal shot. He got out and fired a round
striking a window setting off the alarm. Then he fired two more rounds hitting something he couldn’t see. With each shot, The Scarlet Knights form became more visible. On the fourth round, The Scarlet Knight formed and became visible. Sean fired his last shot from his five-round revolver then he threw the gun at the knight.

The knight caught the revolver and crushed it in his hand. Sean fell backward into the open door of his truck. He came back with a tire iron in his hand. In that same voice, the knight said, “no that will never do. You don’t bring a tire iron to a sword fight.” The iron changed in his hands becoming a short sword. The knight drew a long scarlet broadsword. Sean put his hand down and dropped the sword. He then put his hands up only to find the sword was back in his hand. He tried to drop the sword again, but it was stuck in his hand. The knight struck the sword sending it and Sean toward the truck where the sword struck a spare tire. Sean tried to pull the sword, but it was buried in the rubber. The knight put his sword across the outstretched arms of Sean saying, “in some places, you would lose a hand for stealing and in others your life.” Sean put his left hand down and turned his head waiting for either the loss of a hand or his life.
After five minutes he opened his eyes to see he was holding a tire iron against a spare tire. The knight was gone, and the police were arriving. Daryl was still down, and he had no idea where Dave was. A voice from one of the police cars told him to drop the weapon as two officers got out of a car. They were followed by six more officers from other cars. Sean dropped the iron, and it took a bounce back into his crotch with a wet smacking sound. He went to his knees with his hands over the wrong head as the police ordered him to lay flat on the ground with his arms spread. One of the officers checked on Daryl cuffing him then calling for an ambulance. The lead officer on the scene leaned in and whispered to Sean, “I think if you don’t want to end up in a padded cell for the rest of your life you might want to leave out what you saw here tonight.” Sean looked at his tire iron as they pushed it away from him and said, “I don’t know where I would start.” Off in the distance, Jacks watched the takedown and bust with a smile.

Bill landed near his window and climbed in only to find his father waiting for him. He grabbed Bill by the shirt and pushed him against the wall while taking Bill’s wallet in one motion. In his excitement after the bust, Bill forgot to exchange wallets. He had about thirty dollars and a condom in this wallet. His father took the money and looked at the condom. He
said, “keep dreaming tiny, there isn’t a woman alive that will ever want a useless piece of crap like you.”

He dropped the wallet and condom on the floor. He then kicked the bed breaking the wood frame. The bed sagged in the middle. His father said, “put the mattress on the floor and sleep like the useless animal you are.” He stormed out leaving the door open. His mother saw the bed, and she started to get mad until her husband said, “do you want him to end up like the others? He needs to learn respect.” She looked at Bill as her face hardened toward him until she came over and closed the door.

Bill pulled the mattress off onto the floor then he disassembled the frame and put the pieces in the corner of the nearly empty room. He rolled into bed and onto the floor of his house on the other side. There was no sign of Nadia, so Bill stepped out and saw a new sight. The inner wall was gone with many of the stones repurposed into new buildings in place of the suburb like surroundings that once were on the outside of the shorter wall. The city grew, almost doubling in two nights. Bill went back inside and searched the closet until he found a pair of charcoal slacks, a white shirt, a matching vest, and a scarlet tie. On the floor was a pair of black wingtips with black socks tucked inside. He changed and went to a mirror to tie the tie. The man in the mirror was strong and handsome and
nothing like how he saw himself. On a hook near the door, he found the matching coat to the slacks. He stepped back out in what he was coming to call his 1960’s disguise. He walked to a corner where the inner wall started, and he turned toward the new part of the city.

Up in the tower, Hendrick watched Bill walk down the street. He stared at the place where the wall was wondering if he still had a castle at all. The body of a chambermaid lay in the corner of the room. He took his anger out on the woman as she cleaned the room. The queen knew to stay away and was willing to lose as many of her maids to his wrath until he was willing to accept something he had no power to change. Hendrick was a king will little to no power over his kingdom. Whoever holds the book has the power. As a prison attendant in Auschwitz, Lotta could remember the stories about her now husband. How he liked to watch, the people burn. Many people told her how he always had this ashen smell to him. A part of the city was populated with former members of the Nazi party picked from hell to help the new king feel at home and it worked for the queen as well. The place was nicknamed little Reich, and it had all the traditional flavors of Germany they both knew well.
On the corner of a new block, Bill found a group of young men singing a sort of acapella doo-wop with one of them rapping the words rather than straight out singing. The city felt like one large movie set or the most realistic LARP he had ever seen. Something like a renaissance fair set in the 1960’s. The fake feeling was everywhere from how clean everything was to the look on people’s faces. He turned a corner and heard a new sound. Someone was screaming. Bill ran to the sounds of screaming to find three men and a woman. Two men were holding this woman that was more of a girl than a woman while the third was cutting away her dress. She was nearly naked with slash marks and blood on the remains of her dress. One of the men turned to Bill and said, “go fuck off, this bitch is our hump.” The girl turned to Bill and pleaded, “help.” His vision turned red, and he felt himself grow as the suit became a suit of red armor. The first man turned away from the girl and came after the knight. The blade dinged off the armor as the knight swung up striking the man in the face. As the gauntlet made contact, he could feel the man’s skull crush and distort.

The body fell to the ground as the other two men pushed the girl at Bill and ran down the alley. She fell to the ground staring up at the knight. She stopped the knight from pursuing the others as she stared down at the body of her husband trying not to cry. They were
told to put on an act so this boy could feel like a hero, but nothing was mentioned about him killing any of them, but now her husband was dead, and she was left to try and live eternity without him. Hell had separated them again. She had one more job. The imp and the king wanted this boy to feel he deserved a reward for saving people, so she waited for him to turn back to the man to give him a reward. Bill’s vision cleared, and the red became the dark grays of stone and shade. As soon as he was in his suit, the girl was undoing his belt and going for him, but before she could work the zipper, Bill stopped her asking, “what are you doing?” The girl said, “rewarding you good sir.” Bill picked her up from her kneeling position to her feet and said nothing, he just walked away.

Bill turned back into the knight and flew back to his house in the center of the city. He walked in and found Nadia there waiting for him. She knew that the girl was supposed to seduce him after he saved her, but she was surprised to see him so soon. He had this almost manic excitement on his face. He walked over to her pushing her against the wall kissing her as he pulled his pants down and entered her. With every thrust, she hit the wall in an energetic almost violent, passionate expression of desire. In what felt like a quick thought she bit Bill on the neck, and that only seemed to reinforce his excitement in his actions. In
her life before and her life after her death she had never felt anything like this before, and when he came, she knew she was in love with him just like she knew he was in love with someone else. Bill stopped letting Nadia slowing down as he said, “I’m sorry.” She whispered back, “don’t be that was amazing.” Bill whispered, “no, that’s not what I mean.” Nadia replied, “I know, but please let's just have this moment and let whatever is be what it will be later.”

The girl was brought before Hendrick and tossed before him as he sat on his throne. She went to her knees with her elbows on the floor saying, “your majesty I tried, but the boy just wasn’t interested.” Hendrick looked to his guards than his wife. He said, “despite your failure to fulfill your job, the boy still did his heroic bullshit and went back home for a rather energetic reward with someone who knows how to fuck.” He turned to the queen who knew she was to leave the room and when she was gone Hendrick stood up and dropped his pants. He sat back down, and the girl crawled on her knees to him and tried to take him by the mouth. Hendrick stopped her and said, “clothes off.” She climbed on top, and she started to gyrate on him. This went on for a few minutes until he came inside her. He then pushed her off him as he stood up. Hendrick called for his guards. Two guards came in,
and he pointed to the girl saying, “OK, take the head and place it on a pike out in the forest.”

Nadia undressed Bill and started a bath for him. She then undressed and joined him in the oversized bathtub. She slipped into the water and behind Bill as he stared forward. He said, “I feel so tired and wired all at the same time as if I just stayed up all night drinking Red Bull.” Nadia was from a time long before energy drinks, so she had no idea what Red Bull was, but she did know what was going on with Bill, how the books never let the holder rest. He or she is awake on either side until they belong to the book. She took a bar of soap from the side of the tub and rolled it around in her hand until she had some lather. She then started to wash his shoulders then his chest. She could feel him change from the man back to the young boy he was in the real world. His height change wasn’t as drastic as she thought, and he only had to move up a little to be back to the place he was before. Nadia whispered into his ear, “take me like you are.” She knew not to say make love to me because it would trigger him to think about how he didn’t love her.

Back in their bed, Bill lay on top of her still insider her after they had what most would have called made love. The act was more than sex to Bill and even
more than that to Nadia but neither wanted to admit it was wrong. It was in these quiet moments between right and wrong she could hear her children. For what felt like a lifetime of suffering all she could remember was what she did to them to get a man that never wanted her. She had sold her soul for an empty promise, and it cost her everything but most of all it cost her children’s future. She knew that this boy on top of her has a potential future with a girl he loves and might even love him but here she was again stealing someone’s future. Bill slid to her side. Nadia looked at the tired-eyed boy next to her and said, “Bill I have to tell you something about me and that book. I think in the end it might just cost me everything, but I can’t go on doing this. You have to know who and what I am and why you must get rid of the book.” Bill leaned in and kissed her naked shoulder. He said, “you can tell me anything.” Just then a buzzer went off, and Bill found himself on his mattress on the floor in his small room alone.

Nadia looked at Bill, but something was wrong, he didn’t look like himself. His face had an almost plastic aesthetic. The Deceiver pushed Nadia back and got on top of her. He brushed his hand across her face then he punched her as he entered her. Unlike Bill, this man was more of a machine as he raped her in her own bed. He told her to scream because he likes the noise.
Nadia tried to fight, but he was just too strong. As he thrust his appearance went from Bill to his alter ego as the former plastic surgeon turned monster known as the Deceiver. When he was done, he whispered into her ear, “I was told to take out the trash and guess who the trash is baby.” He put one of his large long hands over her mouth and nose. She struggled and fought as her sight started to show blotches of black until everything was black and she was back floating in her own private hell with the sounds of her dying children all around her. She could feel the creature that devoured her until she would reemerge and relive it all again circling her. She screamed, “I am so sorry, I don’t care what happens to me but please help Bill.”

The stirring water changed and behind her, a light emerged up from the water until it filled the horizon. She turned to see this white light that filled the darkness. A voice came from the light asking, “would you stay in hell to save the boy?” Nadia said, “I would stay because its where I belong, but I would do anything to save Bill.” The light seemed to shift as the water moved toward it until Nadia realized the watery landscape was tilting and she was heading for the light. The water took her to an edge, and she fell off into an empty void of nothing but white light. She landed on a grassy field with a cloudless blue sky above. She could hear water and what sounded like waves breaking on a
shore. Nadia got up and found she was on a beach from her past. It was the beach she and Victor would take their children in the summertime before his death. A happy place full of happy times. Off in the distance, she could see Victor, her first and true love and their children. Nadia asked, “I am so sorry for what I did could you ever forgive me?” Victor took her into his arms then kissed her. He said, “there is nothing to forgive, let the past go and enjoy what we have.” Nadia saw a series of shacks in the distance just off the beach. Victor said, “they said they will send someone to help the boy, but you did your time and should rest.”

Bill got up and took a shower. He dressed for school and left as quietly as possible. Just out of his ability to see, a woman watched him do all this. She was in a pair of white slacks, a white shirt, and a white jacket. He seemed familiar to her, but she didn’t know why. The book, however, was something she knew all too well. Cather bought that same book for her daughter Kaylee, and it cost her everything. She eventually killed herself to keep the book from taking her daughter’s soul. She was convinced her actions would damn her soul forever, but she found herself instead in a white room with no door or windows. A seam formed on one wall and a bright light showed through until a form walked in. The form was in the shape of a person but made of bright white light. It told
Cathern she was chosen to help people in need and her first act would be to help a young boy escape the book. She turned and followed Bill as he walked to school. She eventually remembered him, “wait a minute, you’re that comic nerd from the park.”
Chapter Nine

Hendrick watched Bill on the other side as he went to classes and tried to talk to the girl. The Deceiver came into the throne room and kneeled to the king. Hendrick turned around and said, “it wasn’t your job to kill her. Vot won’t be happy.” The Deceiver did his best to smirk, but the many surgeries he had done gave him only a perpetual surprised look. He said, “her death was always a part of the plan, and she was going to warn him.” From a dark corner of the room, Vot said, “yes but we needed him to have more of a vengeful anger over her death rather than one of lost opportunities and regret. All you did was solve his problem, and that was not your job.” Vot grew into his real form the tall ugly monster. He grabbed the Deceiver and twisted his head off. The body fell to the floor changing into a pile of rags. Vot turned back into the Imp with the head still in his hands. He turned to Hendrick and said, “everyone is replaceable.” He tossed the head on the pile of rags, and it shattered into pieces.

Vot said, “this is an important day my friend. Today we meet the other side and set the terms for both the boy’s soul and the soul of the girl.” Hendrick backed away until he fell onto his throne. Vot said, “as the king, you will meet and bargain for souls.” Vot
smiled then he said, “don’t worry, you won’t talk. I do all the talking here, it’s your job to be there.” Hendrick asked, “what will this look like?” Vot told him that it will all depend on if the other side wants to make a case for saving his soul. Vot said, “this hasn’t happened since the Gray Knight and only because he was a young child with a disability.” Vot walked over and opened a door. As he did, a cold gust of air came through with the scent of something familiar to Hendrick. He walked over and saw the door opened onto a flat plateau on the side of a mountain. The view was of a valley, and in the distance, he could see his castle. The plateau was paved with impossibly large stones with a stone wall that seemed to be hundreds of years old. In the center of this ancient meeting camp was a large stone table with stones placed as seats.

Vot opened his jacket and pulled out two large rolls of parchment paper. He rolled them out onto the table. At the top was some sort of writing that Hendrick didn’t recognize. Vot pointed to one saying, “Billy-boy” then to the other saying, “the girl.” Vot pointed at a seat at the head of the table, and Hendrick sat down. Vot said, “we wait for three hours and if nothing happens or no one comes then we get what we want and write our own terms.” Hendrick said, “dammit I wanted to see the boy’s face when he finds what’s left of the bitch.” Vot smiled and said, “he
won’t be back for hours and up here time doesn’t move. We could be here for years and not a second will go by down there.” Hendrick asked, “how is that possible?” Vot’s smile faded a bit as he cocked his head and asked, “you are on a mountain in a hell dimension about to meet angels, and that is your question?” From behind him, a young girl came around in a short skirt and a top that just covered the tops of her breasts. She was fair-skinned and blonde just how Hendrick liked them. Vot said, “I thought you might get bored, so I brought you a plaything to have fun with.” She sat in Hendrick’s lap as he put his hand up her shirt exposing a nipple pierced breast.

From behind Vot came a voice, “pig.” Vot turned around and was surprised to see a face he thought he would never see again. He said, “well, well, well, Cathy. I am almost happy to see you.” Catheren said, “I hoped that the bullet would have made sure I would never see you again.” Vot smiled and said, “I wonder how Kaylee is doing without you and me. I bet she spends all her time waiting for you by the door wondering when she is going home.” Catheren looked over at Hendrick and the girl. He had his pants down with her bent over the table as he went at her. Catheren said, “classy……. Listen, little man, we aren’t here for us, or this meeting might go differently. We are here to talk Bill.” Catheren noticed the second scroll and asked,
“who’s the second soul?” Just then the girl hit her head on the stone table with a wet crack as Hendrick came. Vot said, “this is why you can’t have nice things.” He waved his left hand, and the girl was gone. Hendrick finally saw they weren’t alone.

Cathern pointed to the scrolls saying, “no, you can’t have this boy, and you definitely can’t have the girl.” Vot smiled and said, “you don’t have a choice in who gets picked. Whoever opens the book is chosen.” Cathern scowled. She said, “that’s bullshit…… you pick the holder and make sure they are broken down.” Vot mocked Cathern as she spoke waiting for his chance to speak. He said, “listen, Kitty, I don’t open the book, and I don’t force them to make a wish like Kaylee’s wish for friends. I do my job and put temptation in the path of the righteous. It’s them that do the dirty deeds.” Cathern tapped the second scroll and said, “she hasn’t opened the book.” Vot replied, “not yet but it’s inevitable.” Cathern asked, “are you willing to bet on that tiny?” Vot smiled and asked, “it depends on your terms, Kitty?” Cathern walked over to the edge and looked at the castle. She turned to see both Vot and Hendrick followed her. She said, “if you take both souls then you win, but if you don’t then I want you to restore Kaylee.” Vot asked, “and what do I win when I win?” Hendrick said, “free reign to take whomever you want for the next five book holders.”
They both looked at Hendrick then back to each other. From behind them, a voice said, “as long as you take and keep both souls then yes.” The voice came from the mountain, but Vot knew this was a voice belonging to one of the arc angels who never show their faces to him.

Writing started to appear on the scroll. On Bill’s scroll the words souls taken and the number fifteen appeared then on Tina’s scroll a single name, “Angeline Gina Annabella.” The arc angel said, “as it is written on this day let the word stand that within two years this contract must be, or all is nothing.” Cathern whispered to Vot, “I know what you are now, and I know you are bound by your word to keep it or as you said everyone is replaceable.” Cathern jumped up to the top of the rail and over vanishing. Hendrick asked, “what does this mean for that other soul and us?” Vot waved his hand in a dismissive gesture saying, “that’s none of your concern. Darren is just a means to an end.” Hendrick turned around and saw he was back in his throne room. He turned back, but Vot and the hillside were gone. He walked over to the curved glass and asked for a view of Darren Martin, but nothing happened. He then said, “Kaylee.”
Kaylee sat near a window watching for the girls to go by on their way to school. The first group home she was in tried to integrate her into a school body that wanted her back but after an incident where she slapped a teacher and spent the rest of the day in a bathroom screaming for David, her dead brother, she was quietly expelled from school and sent to a special home that would watch her. In her time at both homes, she tried to run away back to her own home that was sold to pay for her care. Almost every day she asked about her mother, father, and brother who were all dead. She would also ask about a man named Thomas calling him the silver knight, but no one took her seriously. Beside her was the ghostly form of her brother David cursed to watch over her but never interact with her after he murdered his father thinking he was the one that Kaylee was supposed to kill for the book to take her soul. Kaylee never thought about the book or the little man that would visit her, all she wanted was her family back and her freedom. In her dreams, she was a warrior queen in gold armor with white, silver and gray accents. In her dreams, she was the warrior queen of hell that she almost was before her mother saved her.

At the end of the school day, Bill was convinced Tina was avoiding him. He thought that just maybe the sex was bad, or she regretted having it with
him. He wasn’t sure if he told her he loved her or not. He thought that if he understood love then he was in love with Tina and he couldn’t imagine life without her. He could see giving up the scarlet knight if she wanted. His brother Darren hadn’t been around for days, and his life was slowly going back to normal but normal also meant alone, and he didn’t want to be alone anymore. As he sat in his last class, Tina sat two desks behind him remembering last night and just how much the sex with Bill surprised her. She tried to think about other things, but she kept coming back to them making love. She wanted him again, and she also wanted to tell him she loved him, but she was afraid that he might not love her back. Everything was new to them both, and she had a hard time knowing what to do which was unusual for her. Uncertainty was a new concept for a girl that lived her life accepting what happens as it happens and does what she thinks is right every time.

The school bell rang, and Bill started on his long walk home alone stopping at their bench in the park. As he sat there, Tina approached and hesitated. For a second she wondered if she should say or do anything or just go a different way. She knew if she did they would most likely end with clothes all over the place and being arrested for public indecency. She felt the uncertainty creep in until she saw just how
lonely Bill was sitting there by himself. Bill started to get up when Tina came around the bench and pushed him back climbing into his lap. She said, “hello there. Do you mind if I sit here?” As an answer, Bill kissed her. Tina was wearing a long skirt that covered Bills lap. She could feel him grow erect up against her. She whispered into his ear, “not here.” Bill said he knew about an old trail that was closed with a bench. Tina got up and pulled her panties off handing them to Bill asking, “what are we waiting for?” Bill put the panties in his pocket and led her to the place where he first saw that couple in a summer that seemed like a thousand years ago and not just a few months. He dropped his pants and sat down as Tina got on top. Bill looked down and said, “I don’t have a condom.” Tina stopped him saying, “I don’t care.”

She left him in the park with a smile on his face and a skip in her step. About halfway home she realized Bill still had her panties. She pictured Bill’s mother finding them when she did the laundry and wondering if Bill had a girlfriend or a fetish. She didn’t know that Bill did his own laundry and has done so since he was eight-years-old. She passed an elderly couple sitting on a bench holding hands not saying a word with everything being said by their contact and how close they were to each other. She could see her, and Bill like that many years from now just like how
she couldn’t see her own parents being together in the next year. She knew she had nothing to do with their problems and whatever was going to happen was going to happen with or without her fear of them not being together. She soon realized she was back home and all that thinking about what might happen made her want what she has.

Brenda woke up to find the owner of the club in her room with two of his bodyguards. She was under a blanket, in a hospital gown but she felt naked for almost the first time in her life. Not even as she danced topless on a stage or fully naked in a guy’s lap did she ever feel so exposed as she did right there and then. He saw she was awake and told his guards to step outside. When they were gone, he asked, “hey, sweetie is you OK?” Brenda thought that sweetie was unusual for this tough black man from Harlem. She asked, “Tri-T I just don’t know what to say about what happened.” He put his hand on her hand and said, “call me Terry or Terrance and don’t worry about anything. The club is covering all your bills, and we will find that customer, and he will pay.” Terrance voice turned harsh on the words customer and pay. He told her that they take care of their own. He said, “I remember this white guy from back in the day in Queens. He wanted to be a gangster and tried selling drugs, but the brothers didn’t want anything to do with him. I think he called
himself Jacks, but I don’t care. Some of the local hoods beat that hump down.” Brenda asked, “I thought you were from Harlem?” Terence put his finger to his lips and made a shushing sound. He said, “to most people outside of the boroughs any strong black man must be from Harlem, so I went with it letting people call me Tri-T for Terence Tiberius Thompson.” Before she could ask Terence said, “mom and dad were Trekkies. I have a brother named James and a sister named Uhura Michelle.”

Jacks closed the most recent room to be used as a vault placing a lock on the door. In the week of sales, they filled two rooms with cash and were now starting on a third. They were approaching half of a billion dollars with the number climbing higher and higher. He had tried the drug, but as a ghost, it had no effect on him. He told the King that they could fill every room in this castle with cash but without a way to deposit the cash in the bank it would be worthless. Darren said he was working on the way to launder the cash and he should just do his job. From time to time Jacks remembered Hell and being something’s bitch for what felt like many years, but all this cash made him think about his own operation or at least the one he made in his head back in Queens. He also wanted to go back and work over the sister again. Dominating her took the sting away from the years of ass-rape he
endured in hell. He told one of the other dealers that, “hell is like a prison, you go in a criminal and come out a monster.”

Bill got home to the sounds of his parents having sex again in the living room. Every time it took him by surprise and made him just a little nauseated. On the way to his room, his mother asked, “stop...... Bill, have you heard from the twins in the last day or so?” Bill turned to see his mother holding up her shirt over her chest, but they were still moving up and down having sex. Bill shuttered a little then he said, “not since they locked themselves in the basement.” Frank stopped when he heard the word basement and the thought of the door he had to knock down after the twins nailed themselves inside. He said to Bill, “just go and let me...... I mean us get back to what we are doing.” His mother waved him off and, in the process, dropped her shirt revealing the scar on her breast from a cancer lump she had removed two years ago. Bill turned and made it to his room. On the way in he heard his mother say, “fuck me....... fuck me.” Bill thought that the best birth control was seeing and or hearing your parents have hard-sex.

Cathern knew that Bill was going to go to sleep and find out what was left of Nadia in their home. He
would blame himself as well as go into a rage and go looking for the ones that killed her. Her death would change him forever and just maybe cost him his soul. She looked to him then thought about her son David. He killed her husband just as they were getting back together thinking he was saving Kaylee. She didn’t understand before, but now she would do anything to prevent what was about to happen. As she watched Bill do his homework, the little imp Vot appeared to her. He gave her a silver and gold coin and said, “I think we both want to keep him away from that scene as long as we can and to do that I will do something that could hurt me…… I will let him sleep.” Cathern asked, “why are you helping him?” Vot said, “I have this friend I helped------well…….. Saved and he would be happy that I helped the boy.” Cathern held the coin up, and it vanished. Vot said, “when he goes to sleep he will not dream. But this will only work one time.”

Bill closed his eyes and woke up the next day in what felt like just a second, but he felt better than he had in weeks. He wanted to have that talk with Nadia and let her down easy, but he knew he needed the downtime and she would be there when he went back. He turned and checked the time. It was Saturday at six-thirty in the morning. He dressed for running and went out hoping if he ran past Tina’s house she would join him. He could see what they were going was just a
little too fast for their own good. He knew he loved her, but he also could see them burning out long before they could cement their relationship and that was what he wanted, a relationship. Bill said to himself, “the sex was getting in the way.” Instead of building on their relationship they were just having fun. He snuck past his parent’s room and out the door. With every step, he lost sight of the house and felt free of its pull. He always felt better leaving then coming home.

Tina sat by her window waiting to see if Bill runs by. She had no way to call him and after his mother caught her staring at him change she didn’t want to look her in the face. She somehow knew that if she looked into her eyes, she could tell that they were having sex. The thought of Bill and sex made her think about that first time then the second in the park. Sex was something she never thought about before. She dreamed of being with Bill, but the act of sex was not a part of her dreams, but now that was all she thought about when it came to Bill. She turned around and saw him in her room. He was in a pair of white shorts and a white tank top. He walked up to her taking off his shirt and letting his shorts fall to the floor. Tina sat up and put her arms around him. Just outside the window, Bill ran by and Tina woke up from her daydream. She got dressed and joined him on what would be a long run.
They ran for miles with Bill trying to find a way to talk to her about slowing down and Tina wondering what he will be like all sweaty. With Bill in the lead, they took a different way avoiding the park only to find themselves near another park and another secluded spot. They stopped, and Bill took off his shirt. They sat in the grass staring at the river saying nothing to each other until Tina leaned in and kissed him. Bill knew where this was going, and he felt guilty that he could be using her, but he also wanted her. Tina was in a tennis skirt over a pair of running shorts. She slipped the shorts off and got into his lap. As she did this, she pulled his shorts down and eased onto him. They were both sticky with sweat and hot from the run. Tina whispered into Bill’s ear, “I love you.” All the thoughts of slowing down left his mind as he replied, “I love you too.” Hearing the words from her helped Bill know his own feelings and helped him accept what they were doing. When he came, it felt like nothing he ever felt before almost like he let all his fear and anxiety go with one burst. Tina thought, “we have to stop having sex without a condom.”

Frank was at a job interview for a manager’s position with a plastics company in Akron. He had experience as both a manager and as a machine
operator for a plastics company. The interview went well, and the human resources manager seemed to act like he already had the job. Frank was ready to go back after being on unemployment and his wife’s wages for far too long. At home, he had one child that he didn’t trust or like and a wife that was starting to talk back. He felt that if he wasn’t earning money, he wasn’t the head of the house. With the interview over, Frank went to his favorite club and watched the girls dance. A hundred dollars bought him a lap dance with a fresh-faced barely legal girl that was a copy of his wife just as she was twenty years ago. She did her best twerking and thrusting with Frank growing to her attention. As she did this, she whispered, “another hundred will get you more.” Another hundred and Frank found himself engaging in sex with a girl that was sixteen and illegally dancing. As he came, the house lights came on, and the police busted in finding him with the teenager. Frank said, “come on guys it’s just sex.”

An hour later and Darren was at the police station picking up his father. Frank was surprised to see the roll of cash Darren had as well as how the police let him go and tore up the arrest report. The bribe cost him over twenty thousand dollars, but Darren knew the cash would buy him back into his father’s house. Outside in the car, Darren gave Frank a suitcase with five-hundred thousand dollars. It would
be enough to buy him out of his debt as well as restart his business. Frank looked at the money, but he didn’t see any of it, all he saw was how he acted to his family over the last seven years. With the money, he would be debt free but not guilt free. Both his daughters turned to dancing to pay the bills. He took everything away from his youngest son including his dignity. Frank closed the case and said, “thank you, son.” Darren said, “this isn’t free. I need help laundering my cash.” Darren drove them to a closed and empty storefront in a strip mall in Ellet. He said, “I want to open a fake art studio here where my people will buy art with my cash, so I can pay taxes and look legit.” Frank said, “people will see through that in a second. Just take the cash to a country that has banking laws that won’t question where the money comes from then convert it into pounds or Euros. Why pay Uncle Sam a dime.”

After going back and getting his car, Frank drove home. He stared at his house from the outside. He had sold everything he could and did nothing to maintain the house making their home the worst on the block. He thought about the dreams he had for him and his family. They wanted to buy the house while expanding his business. He wanted to send all the children to college making sure they were debt-free as they started their lives. So many dreams ended when the business failed. He said, “my biggest failure is me
as a husband and a father.” Frank counted out two-
hundred and Thirty-thousand dollars and put it in a
separate bag. It was everything he owed plus ten
percent. He put the money in his car and drove to see
his father’s old partner, his uncle, John. He wasn’t his
real uncle but, John Grant was as close to an uncle as
he ever knew. When he turned on him costing him
everything, Frank didn’t know what to do. He pulled
up to the Super Quickie Payday Loan and Check
Cashing where John ran both his legal as well as the
illegal loan business. He took a pack of cash and put it
in an envelope. Inside behind the bullet-resistant glass,
he saw John. The man had this smile every time he
saw Frank. This “I took your life, and there’s nothing
you can do about it look.” Frank slid the cash through
a slot and said, “the rest is in the car....... you can have
them both.”

Bill lay down ready to go to sleep and speak to
Nadia about where they were going and that she would
always have a home as far as he was concerned. He
closed his eyes and reopened them to a warm,
cloudless sky. He lay there for a moment until a harsh
ashen smell came by him. Bill sat up and looked
around until he saw the black smoke coming from the
castle. Off in the distance, he could see crosses and
people crucified on them missing their heads. Bill
became the knight and took to the sky in a race back to
the castle. On the way, he saw burned-out homes and bodies. The gatehouse was burned down, and the gate was pulled open with the iron door off its hinges. Going down the street, he could see the damage of what must have been a violent attack. On the corner of his block, he saw his door ajar, and the windows busted.

The knight pulled the door the rest of the way off the hinges and broke the frame, so he could fit into the house. The shared kitchen and living rooms were trashed with a dark substance smeared on the wall saying, “all hail the true king.” Bill felt this rage with his vision turning a scarlet red and his face heating to the point that he felt like he was going to explode. All that rage and fury vanished into a cold distance feel as he saw her body. As he approached her the knight turned back to Bill. Nadia was on the bed with her arms and legs spread and her head off her shoulders on a spike driven into the bed two feet above her body. On the wall in what must be her blood was, “no false kings, no false idols, no false knights.” Behind him he heard a voice, “she screamed out for you, but you never came.” Bill spun around to find a small boy with open wounds across his arms and two black eyes.
The boy told Bill how a group of knights came into the city raping and murdering anyone they found. Their leader was a knight in all silver and on his right side was the blue knight. They were turned back at the castle keep by the king and his loyal knights but at the cost of many lives and the queen. Bill stood back up and looked to the castle. The boy said, “I don’t know if you will be someone they want to see right now. As the king’s champion you were supposed to protect the kingdom but....... Where were you?” Bill asked, “where can I find this silver knight?” The boy replied, “he has a castle in the foothills, but he also has five of the knights and many soldiers. It would be suicide to go after him alone.” Bill turned to the body and pulled the head off the spike. He then tied the body up in the sheets and took it out and up into the sky. On a hill near the castle, he made a funeral pyre and burned the body. When the fire died down, he rebuilt it and burned any dead bodies he came across until the city was free of the dead. The boy smiled turning back into Vot.

The night before the queen watched as the silver knight and his army marched through the streets raping and killing anyone they found. She knew that everyone that was killed was being sent back to the hell where they found them. Hendrick came up from behind her and said, “a cleansing fire is just what we
needed to put people back in their places.” Lotta turned to her husband and said, “we need to stop this before it goes too far, and we lose any hope of redemption.” Hendrick smiled and kissed his wife. He said, “no my dear this is only the beginning and redemption is for the redeemable.” He spun her around and pushed her out the window. She fell and fell until she landed back in Auschwitz but not as a guard but one of the many children she sent off to be murdered. Lotta knew this role well because this was a hell of her own making. Hendrick looked down at the fires, bodies and the broken ragdoll that was his wife and smiled. Most of all he liked the fire and the memories.

Bill could feel the uneasy eyes as he walked to the castle. The look of fear and anger made his penance of burning the dead feel hollow. At the entrance to the keep, the king’s guards stopped him saying how the king was accepting no visitors. Bill became the scarlet knight and tried again but the guard said, “where were you when the silver king came and tore the city apart, where were you when the women and children cried and died, where were you when the queen died? We needed a hero, not a child.” From behind them, a voice said, “let the knight pass or lose your head.” They turned to see Hendrick dressed in black with orange accents. He said, “the knight was held up on the other side, or he would have been here
so let him pass now.” Bill went to his knee before the king. As he went down, he changed from the tall, handsome armored knight to the sixteen-year-old man who was slowly starting to show the first signs of the man he would become. Bill said, “I am so sorry. I don’t know why I didn’t come back last night I went to sleep and there was nothing until the next day.” Hendrick knew all about how Vot let the boy sleep so they could arrange the raid. Hendrick led Bill to the closed casket of the queen. Beside the casket was the young maid that would play the role of the queen in the king’s bed that night. Hendrick smiled over the idea of just how good his bachelor's life will be and how it was good to be the king.

Bill woke the next day in a cold sweat staring at a ceiling pitted with water stains from a leak in the long past. Tina’s family was spending the day in Virginia visiting her brother’s grave in Arlington. He joined the Marines and died in Afghanistan in 2010 when a roadside bomb tossed his Humvee off the road. He lived long enough to fend off the people who set the bomb dying as their backup arrived. Every year since then they made the trip to his grave on his birthday. Bill got dressed and went on a run hoping to forget Nadia and the queen as well as all the other people he failed to protect. As he turned a corner, Bill could see he was being followed by his father’s car. He
didn’t know or care about what his father wanted, all he wanted to do was run in peace. Bill entered a park, and the car stopped then took off burning rubber off the tires on to the road. Two men in generic gray coveralls started to follow Bill. About halfway into the park, there was a parking lot. As Bill approached the lot he saw the car and the man his father called uncle John.

Bill tried to run past the lot when two other men also in coveralls stopped him long enough for the two behind Bill to catch up. The two from the back grabbed Bill as one of the guys in front punched him in the face, and the other one punched him in the gut. The two from behind picked Bill up and tossed him at the feet of John. Bill landed on his knees and the palms of the hands. John said, “your father thinks he can insult me. He thinks he can just pay me off, and that would be that, but he doesn’t understand that I own him now and forever.” John stamped down on Bill’s right hand giving off an audible crack. John said, “tell your father he still owes us……. let’s say two-hundred and eighty thousand for his disrespect. Tell him from your hospital bed why we broke your arms and legs. Let him know he should treat his betters better.” Bill got to his feet seeing that same red rage in his eyes and feeling the same white-hot heat on the top of his head. Off in
the distance, Vot sat in a folding chair with a tub of popcorn waiting for the show.

Bill twitched his right hand, and the bones realigned. He then stood taller growing with every beat of his racing heart until he was no longer Bill, he was the scarlet knight. The four men backed off, but John stepped up and swung a tire iron he was holding in his left hand. The iron struck the armor but did no damage. One of the men behind the knight pulled and fired a 357-magnum revolver point blank at the knight’s head, but the round bounced off striking the other man behind the knight in the throat. The knight took the two men in front of him by the heads and smashed them together with a cracking sound then he kept pushing until their skulls distorted out of shape. Vot made two marks in a notebook counting the deaths. The knight pushed John at the car bouncing him off the driver’s side door. The man behind him kept firing his gun until it was empty. The knight put his left hand on the man’s shoulder and struck him with his closed right fist feeling the man’s face pulp and push back into his skull. Vot made another mark. The knight looked down at the man lying on the ground and drove his foot into his already bleeding throat smashing it flat. Vot wasn’t sure if killing an already dying man would count. John pulled a Desert Eagle 50-caliber and fired at the knight with the rounds flattening and falling to the ground.
The Knight spun John around then he twisted John’s head until it faced backward. Vot made another mark.
Chapter Ten

Robert “Bobbie” Jenkins was a prosecutor in the state of Mississippi for twenty years before he started to defend the kind of man he would let go with little to no investigations. Both his friends and enemies called him Bobbie Lee. As a member of the Ku Klux Klan, he made sure his fellow members were protected as he prosecuted those they felt needed to go. As the federal government moved in and started to enforce anti-discrimination laws, he found the need to leave his post and defend those men he kept out of jail. It was 1964 and Jenkins was at the height of his game, and near the end of his life, he just didn’t know yet. That night they planned a cross burning at the house of a man that won a civil case against one of the members. They would either burn the cross or hang the man from a nearby tree. Over his sixty years of life, he took place in many of both. Even if the others hadn’t decided yet, he already knew the man had to die, or others would sue using his law for their justice.

They got their supplies together and waited for nightfall. One of the members pointed out the man was a veteran, and he could put up a fight. Bobbie Lee just said, “no boy can whip a man in a fair fight or a less than a fair fight. We fight as fair as we need to so we, the white race can keep our place as the masters.”
Another voice from behind him said, “yeah no shit we are all members of this club and know all this shit.” Everyone laughed except for Bobbie Lee who didn’t like how someone got a laugh at his expense. The sunset and night came with a black sky that would help the cross radiate a glow of hellfire piercing the land with hate. In the dark, a couple of men set the cross while the others drank and planned how they would catch the guy and which tree he would hang from. When it was finally ready to light they had a hard time with the cross. Someone noticed that the guy's car was missing, and just maybe they were not home. A voice came from the dark, “as far as the law is concerned I’m in Alabama right now.” Isiah Jefferson struck a match and lit a cigar. The light revealed five men with lever-action rifles. All the men were black.

Ten minutes later Bobbie Lee lay in a pool of blood from himself and the others that came with him to deal their own kind of justice. The men cleaned up after themselves making sure not to leave any evidence of who did what. One man went around putting a bullet in the heads of every man alive and dead to make sure they didn’t leave any witnesses. As Bobbie Lee watched the man slowly work toward him shooting everyone, time seemed to stop. A voice came from his left saying, “so sad how your plans just didn’t seem to go the way you wanted them...... Just maybe you
should have brought a flashlight.” Bobbie Lee turned and saw what looked like a child in a hood and robe. The child slipped out of the robe revealing a clean white suit. Vot took off the hood showing he was no child. He said to Bobbie Lee, “I need someone who can serve my master. If you fit that bill, then you won’t go to hell. You will go where ever you want and do whatever you want as long as you do as your told.” Bobbie Lee muttered, “but I’m a white man I don’t go to hell I send people there.” From his right, Bobbie Lee heard, “hey, we got another live one here.” Then a sound of thunder and blackness.

Bobbie Lee woke to find himself on a glass floor with what looked like a starry sky below him. Vot walked up to him and said, “stand and know.” He stood and found all the pain was gone. In a reflection of the glass, he saw he was unharmed and a young man again. Bobbie Lee asked, “am I dead? is this heaven?” Vot smiled and said, “yes and....... well....... hell no.” The glass floor shifted sending Bobbie Lee down onto his knees and the palms of his hands. One of the points of light flashed red and filled the pain of glass with red light. When the light subsided, Bobbie Lee could see a rocky red environment with the smell of sulfur and rancid pork cooking. Vot said, “this is what most people like you think of when you think of hell. Fiery pits and burning flesh. Hell is so much more than this
childish interpretation but to truly understand what I am offering you need to understand reality.” Off in the distance, Bobbie Lee could see his old tree fort when he was a kid. He ran to it and climbed inside where he found Vot waiting for him. Vot said, “I’m going to tell you a story.”

God created the heavens and the earth. Notice how I said heavens because it’s important. On that rock that later became known as the earth, God created life. Out of that life came the first humans. They weren’t like what they are now. Just primitive need driven creatures. OK, maybe a little more like people are today. God made a special place for the humans who stood above the rest, and God called it Eden. To prove they deserved to live in the garden, God took what was best from every human and made two perfect beings that came to be known as Adam and Eve. God placed them in the garden and set only one rule. A tree in the center of the garden was forbidden. God then put one of the servants in charge of trying to make them break that rule. Lucifer didn’t want the job, so he set out to tempt them into breaking that rule. From that, I was born. As the voice of temptation, I was tasked with tempting them into eating a special apple and ending Lucifer’s task. When my job was done, I was tasked with tempting more humans into selling their
souls using what became a book bound in flesh from Lucifer.

People are energy. When people die their energy goes into either one of the heavens or is recycled or what you call reincarnated. Where you go and what’s waiting for you is more about who and what you were as much as what you believe. For most, they create their own plane of existence turning it into a heaven or a hell depending on how they lived. Good, bad, it doesn’t matter who you were most souls find themselves in some sort of hell. A Nazi guard will find him or herself as a prisoner facing the very crimes they committed. That sort of thing. In one of these places, a special plane was made for Adam, Eve and their son Cain. There they would be separate from humanity and live forever as punishment for breaking the rule. The book became a way to fill that plane with people to keep things interesting. They went from simple cavemen to Romans and finally knights in armor. In-between the planes there is the void. A black nothingness that is inescapable. Eventually, both Adam and Eve did something that allowed Lucifer to toss them into that void forever. Cain escaped and is somewhere else.
Vot smiled and said, “if you take the job then you will work for me by deceiving the people. As one of my Deceivers, you can do almost anything you want as long as you don’t outright impact the worlds as in killing and what not.” Bobbie Lee looked out onto the hellish nightmare waiting for him and asked, “do I really have a choice?” Vot said, “it depends on just how well-done you want your dick cooked before they feed it to you.” Vot took a small black fruit shaped like a cherry out of his pocket. He said, “eat this and become my deceiver.” Bobbie Lee put the cherry in his mouth and chewed. The fruit was bitter and almost toxic in the mouth. Vot said, “when it as done its job you will understand, and we can continue with your education.” Bobbie Lee fell to the ground with his flesh feeling like it was on fire. He looked and saw blisters forming as it darkened. For a second he thought he was turning black until the flesh dried and turned to powder. His joints froze then he lost his sight. When his vision returned, he found he was a pale white from his toes to the hair on his head. He thought about the man that killed him and soon found himself looking like that man. He thought about his father and became him. Bobbie Lee smiled and thought to himself, “this is going to be fun.”

Bill sat down on the bench where he and Tina first met on that run that felt so long ago. He looked at
his clean hands. When he turned back from the knight, the blood vanished with the armor. He could see the face of the man he once called uncle as he went from amused to anger then finally terror. He could also see Nadia’s face both in his bed and on the pike. He knew that on the other side whoever this silver knight was he could attack at any moment and take away something that was his. Off in the distance Bill could hear sirens and he knew why. The death of uncle John would be big news in town even if the Cleveland news media only gives the story a one-day story. Bill thought about all that this man did and how they planned on breaking his arms and legs to send his father a message. How he would pay once again for something, his father did. A cold breeze blew through the park with an ominous portent of the winter that was to come.

Back at the house, Bill could see something different. At first, the change wasn’t that noticeable until it was. New shutters were on the house as well as a new screen door and a new mailbox. Sitting in the driveway was a used pickup. A Ford F-150 with a black cab and a brownish bed. The truck had temporary tags. Bill walked into the house to the smells of cinnamon and baking bread. It had been years since his father made his signature cinnamon rolls. His mother would say how he should give up auto mechanics and open a bakery. Inside he found the
rolls and a note saying how they went to church and he should help himself to as many rolls as he wanted. The note was signed, “love, Dad.” On the table was a contract for a small building as well as a restaurant supply rental store. His father rented several ovens, proofing boxes, and other items such as a commercial mixer. The very things he would need to open a bakery. Bill looked at his hands at the place where the blood should be. Somewhere in a distant memory, Bill could remember how they would go to church every Sunday. When is business failed his father would talk about the church and its members abandon them. Frank would call religion a long con bilking people out of billions.

On the way home Frank and Nancy stopped at a small storefront on Front Street near the river. The shop was near the walking paths and the annual Rocking on the River festival. The festival was canceled last year and was having trouble finding sponsors, but even without the festival, the location would be a good place for a bakery. Frank said, “I feel like such a fool…… but today that changes. When I open this place, I will hire our children and help them pay for college.” Nancy looked down while she thought about her children. She said, “I haven’t heard from the twins in days. It’s not like them to stay away for so long.” Frank said how he would go over and
check their apartment. He said he would also talk to
Brenda and Darren. Nancy said, “I could see allowing
Brenda back, but Darren is not allowed in our house.”
Frank tried to ignore what she said and asked, “how
about a name?” Nancy asked, “how about the
Cinnamon Tiger?” Frank said, “no, that sounds
Chinese. How about the Front Street Bakery?”

Darren walked out of the bank in a new light
gray sharkskin suit and an account that gave him the
ability to deposit his cash without the hassle of
explaining where the money came from. The imp
calling himself Vot would help move the money to this
bank in Senegal as well as other banks in Belize and
Argentina. By the end of the next year, he would be the
richest man in the world and a king in another. Across
town, a man prepared a needle. He spent the morning
cleaning and organizing his apartment and when that
was done he counted every grain of rice in the pantry.
As the drug wore off, he needed another fix to keep the
feeling going. He took the drug and felt better than
ever. As he lay on his floor, he could see every beam
of light, every color of the rainbow that shot across his
field of vision taking him on a trip he would never
escape from. His body was found by his roommate in a
pool of blood from his eyes. He wasn’t the first to die
from the drug nor would he be the last.
Bill closed his eyes and found himself in the ruins of his home back in the castle city. Someone took all the broken furniture away and cleaned the blood off the floor. Outside he could hear construction and a people rebuilding after the attack. Bill walked out and became the adult version of himself. The people didn’t seem happy to see him. There was a stronger military presence on the street as well as a feeling of war in the air. On the wall, he could see soldiers armed with Bows. People ducted their heads as they went by trying not to look at Bill. Fear was everywhere and turning this once peaceful place into something sour. In the center of the city in the castle keep the king watched Bill knowing how he felt. This was his fresh start in a place that would answer to him like Hitler. He said to his new maid, “this is what Hitler did wrong. He needed to be a King and not just some peasant elected official.” The sixteen-year-old Nuri had no idea who Hitler was. She died of the black death in 1349 after she sacrificed her family thinking their deaths would save her life.

In Topeka Kansas, Donald Franks came home from a long day at work knowing his night would be even longer. Little two-year-old Jessie had a cold, and his wife Jessica was seemingly coming down with the
same. Donald noticed a change in Jessica over the last two days. She went from being a wreck to super organized. There was this new drug going around that was being called Ritalin mixed with crack. Donald opened the door to the sound of running water but no crying. The door was open to the bathroom. Jessica yelled, “honey I cured the cold. All she needed was to be germ-free.” In the bathroom he found Jessica bent over with her arms red and raw from the heat of the water and their daughter in the tub under the water dead. On the other side of the world, a man in a sweatshop of a factory was on his thirtieth-hour working a two-man job by himself not knowing that when the drug wore off, he would drop dead from heart failure.

Bill cleaned the kitchen, but he didn’t touch the cinnamon rolls past the two he ate. Frank’s moods can change on a dime taking him from the warm, loving father to a rage monster he knew and distrusted. Bill tried to find things to do so he wouldn’t sit down and slip back into that other world where he had to confront Nadia’s death and this new threat. He had homework as well as a longer project that would account for twenty-five percent of his grade in History. He must defend a position using a modern problem such as how a Federalist would deal with immigration or the project Bill was doing which was How would
Thomas Jefferson fund the modern government. He must have examples of how Jefferson funded projects such as the Louisiana purchase confronting the legality of the purchase. The project was twice as difficult with no computer in the house. Mr. Grace, his history teacher, said he would make sure Bill had access to the computer lab after school when he oversaw detention, but this also gave his teacher access to Bill’s work. Mr. Grace was a tough critic when it came to unfinished work. Bill closed his eyes and reopened them to find his work was gone, and he was back in his home on the other side.

Everything was gone, but the place was clean, and the feeling of death was gone. Bill looked out the window and saw the motorcycle was gone and in its place was a scarlet red sports car. Bill didn’t know much about cars, but he did know the Ferrari logo. Bill checked the upstairs and found nothing. Not a single piece of furniture was left. It was like Nadia never existed until he found a picture of him and her in the living room together. Bill sat down on the floor and started to cry for his lost friend and how he never got to say what he needed to say to her. Hendrick and Vot watched Bill through the curved glass. Hendrick was disgusted over the display of emotion for a woman that was basically his sex slave even if the boy didn’t see it that way. Vot didn’t know what to think. He thought
Bill was just some power junkie looking for a fix, but now he can see something that defied that analogy. Ever since he came back from where he hid Cain, Vot was seeing things in a new light and wondering what it all meant.

Frank and Nancy came home and found Bill asleep at the dining room table. Frank looked over all the papers spread about and thought how much harder school was then when he went. Nancy told Frank that Bill was in AP History, AP Language Arts and AP Math classes. Frank took a flat box out of a bag and placed it in front of the sleeping boy. On the box was a note saying, “no porn.” Frank turned to Nancy and asked, “do you want to go back to the shop or make love?” Nancy replied, “why not both?” They slipped out just as Bill woke up to find the box and the laptop inside. In the car, Frank asked, “could you tell me about my son?” It was the first time in years he referred to Bill as his son and not the product of Nancy’s cheating. Nancy said, “we will have plenty of time to do that as well as anything else.” Nancy unbuckled her seatbelt then she unbuckled Franks pants. She covered her head with her jacket, and she went down on Frank. From his lap, Nancy said, “drive like I have your dick in my mouth.” The truck sat high enough so no one could see inside, and Frank drove in first gear all the way back to the shop.
Darren got on what would be one long flight back to America. Vot had disappeared and left him in Africa. Luckily, he had his passport and enough money to buy a couple of private Jets, but even at tops speeds the flight was going to be a long one. A man on the ground crew offered him a special attendant for the flight that turned out to be a fourteen-year-old girl. Darren could smell a shakedown, and he properly declined the offer. A French-Canadian couple from Quebec asked for a lift back to North America, and Darren said yes. In his pocket was a new form of the drug meant to induce a state of arousal and compliance in the user. Darren called it the ultimate date-rape drug because it makes the user unable to resist then they forget about everything that happened to the point where the drug took a hold their free will. Nathan and Chloe Girard had a little marijuana on them, and Darren let them smoke while he mixed a special drink for the couple. Nathan drifted off from the pot, but Chloe sat in Darren’s lap and started to undress. Nathan woke up an joined them much to Darren’s dismay.

Darren sat in the back of the plane naked and covered in blood and scrapes. Vot joined him stepping over the bodies of Nathan and Chloe as well as the
attendant he hired for the flight. Vot said, “OK, maybe we need to cut this drug as well and just maybe limit it to one person at a time.” Darren thought about how the once pleasant couple fought to the death for his attention. Then the flight attendant joined in after taking a drink of the special drink Darren made for the guests. Darren said, “it was like watching wild animals fight over the last scrap of food.” After Nathan ripped his wife’s throat out, Darren turned into the silver knight and buried his sword into Nathan’s chest. Watching the couple almost eat the flight attendant was too much for Darren. He said to Vot, “get me out of here.” He then turned into the knight and pierced the side of the plane with his sword. He then went to the cockpit and decapitated the pilot and co-pilot before they could react. Ten miles away from U.S. shores the plane went down with all the evidence and about twenty million Euros.

Bill spent the afternoon setting up then using the laptop to work on his paper. About Six o’clock Nancy called saying how they were going to stay in an apartment above the bakery and they won’t be home until tomorrow. As Bill hung the ancient phone up, he saw Tina standing by the open screen door. She was in a white overall bib dress with a white jacket. Bill let her in and she took the jacket off showing she didn’t have a shirt on underneath the dress, showing a lot of
cleavage. For a second she gave him this worried look until Bill told her about the bakery and how they were alone. Tina put her hand on his crotch and said, “I want a show.” To be safe, they went into Bill’s room. Bill kicked off his shoes then he pulled off his shirt while Tina sat upright in the bed watching every move. About the time Bill started to unbuckle his belt Tina said, “no, let me do it.” She slowly undid his belt then the zipper on his fly. She unwrapped him like a present then Bill did the same to Tina. They spent the rest of the night together in his bed as if this was as natural or normal or they weren’t just teenagers still in high school.

Tina woke up, put on one of Bill’s shirts and made her way to the bathroom. On the way, she saw something in the closet. A glimmer of gold and red leather. From a corner of the room just outside of Tina’s view, Vot watched and whispered, “yes, go to the book. Pick it up and feel the leather, smell the gold and open the book.” Tina wondered why Bill was hiding a bible in his closet. She walked over to the book, sat down and picked up the book. The leather had an odd smooth feeling that was warm to the touch almost like picking up a living thing. She stared at the gold then like so many before her she took a sniff of the gold. Vot rolled his eyes and shook his head. He watched so many people do the same thing, but it
always made him wonder why they needed to know how it smelled. It had been many years since they had more than one holder of the book. For a short time, the book became a religious artifact that went from cult to cult taking groups of souls to populate a facsimile of ancient Greece then Rome, but when the model changed so did the method of selection. Tina opened the cover as Vot smiled knowing she was his.

Tina stood back up after putting the book down and went out of the room to make her way to the bathroom. The house was dark, and Tina needed to use the wall to guide her way until she felt something different. A hand took her by the wrist then turned her around as another hand went to her mouth. The unseen force pushed her up against the wall. She struggled, but the man was too strong. She could feel his erection pushing up against her back. Darren whispered, “so, this is the kind of trim my little brother can get.” He pushed her harder against the wall as the bulge in his jeans pushed against her back lifting her shirt to her naked backside. Darren said, “I should show you what a real man can do. I should take what I want and show you who is the real man in this family.” Tina Struggled as much and as fierce as she could until Darren released her mouth and in a quick motion bashed her head into the wall making a hole. Tina saw the dim lights of the hall fade and knew that if she passed out,
he would win. A hand lifted her shirt and made its way
to her right breast as the jeans pushed deeper into her
ass. Just before she went out, she heard a click and the
action of a shotgun.

Darren knew the sound of his dad’s shotgun.
He used it to go hunting once when he was eighteen.
He shot a tree and the bumper of a 1989 Ford Escort
but no deer. He turned around and saw Brenda with the
gun and a look of disgust and terror on her face. She
said, “let go of her you fucking pervert.” Darren smiled
knowing he could kill her without her even coming
close to firing the gun. Vot watched the shotgun and
just how close it was to Tina. He could see the gun was
loaded with 00 Buckshot that would bounce off Darren
and Kill Tina. Darren turned Tina around until her
lifeless body faced the gun while he still held on to her
breast. As Brenda watched, Darren licked Tina’s neck.
Brenda looked at the naked lower half of Tina and
said, “wow, do you really want the sloppy seconds
from your little brother.” Darren backed away a little
from Tina as Brenda lowered the gun. Darren said, “I
should have told Jacks to kill you instead of just
teaching you a lesson.” Brenda brought the gun back
up then she dropped it as Darren let Tina go. Brenda
captured Tina before she hit the ground. She looked up
to Darren just as he kicked her in the face knocking her
out.
Brenda’s first memory was as a toddler walking for the first time to the open arms of her older brother Darren. As a little girl, Brenda knew she could always count on her big brother to watch out for her. For most of her life, Darren was more of a parent than her parents. This doting went on until Darren found his first girlfriend and his first taste of alcohol. Brenda couldn’t remember the girl’s name, but she did remember finding her thirteen-year-old brother with an open bottle of vodka while having sex with the girl from behind. Darren told her then that if she told their parents, “I'll fucking hurt you.” The girl laughed, and Darren never stopped taking her from behind as he stared at his sister. From there Darren became more of a stranger living in the same house. Eventually, they became hostile to one another as the memories of those early days slipped away. Brenda opened her eyes seeing the face of this girl she just defended not knowing her name. She was on the couch as Tina sat nearby with a bag of ice. Brenda’s face throbbed, and she could feel that she was missing teeth. Tina said, “we almost called 911.”

An hour later, Brenda was at the hospital as the police took a statement from her and Tina about the attack. One officer said, “we will issue a warrant for
him as soon as possible, and until he is taken into custody we will offer you protection.” Bill gazed out his window wondering why all this was happening to his family. He also wondered just where Darren was and what he would do if he found him. Tina came over to him and kissed him on the neck. She noticed a strange metallic taste to his skin, but she put that aside to focus on what was happening. She asked, “do you think they will find him?” Bill said, “Darren isn’t bright enough to be able to stay hidden for long.” He turned around and kissed her. He then said, “but I hope they never find him, and he never comes back. He needs to crawl into a hole and die.” Tina took a step back and asked, “Bill you can’t mean that?” Bill replied, “Darren wasn’t going to stop. He was going to rape you, and there was nothing I could do about it.” Tina said, “he’s your brother.” Bill interrupted her saying, “not as far as I’m concerned.” Bill Whispered, “maybe it’s time Darren meets the Scarlet Knight.”

Tina said, “the police want to talk to my parents. When they find out where I was then I’ll end up grounded for life.” Bill said, “we can’t stop what is going to happen all we can do is deal with the aftermath and do what we can to be together.” Brenda made a mock gagging sound and said, “wow, what a load of horseshit. The police only know what you told them and none of that was about what you two were
“doing that night, so if someone adult-like says they were there chaperoning, then it all looks on the up and up.” Both Bill and Tina turned to Brenda who had this smirk on her face. Brenda said, “after all, you two have been giving me a good show for a few days now, so I think I just might owe you.” Tina cocked her head saying, “as much as I want to be mad at you I think...... just maybe....... We can use your help...... pervert.” Brenda smiled and said, “tramp.” Tina replied, “stripper.” Brenda said, “yes, and damned proud of it.”

Bill stepped out onto the street after leaving the hospital thinking about Darren and what he tried to do. He looked up and felt a pull and a need to be untied from the ground jumping up and going into the sky transforming into the knight. Going across the sky, he saw people going about their way oblivious to him and what is around them. In a part of Akron Bill didn’t know he saw a man sitting on a street corner. As he sat there, a young woman came up to him with some cash and the man gave her what looked like a Monopoly card. She took it around a corner as a young boy came up to the man and took the money. The boy went into an apartment building as the young woman approached a fence. On the other side of the fence was another man. She handed him the card, and he gave her a small envelope of what Bill was sure was some sort of drug.
Another boy came up and took the card from the second man and returned it to the first.

Bill jumped down near the man behind the fence. He was still invisible to the man, but the boy saw a shimmer and refractive quality that made him think of the movie the Predator. He grabbed the man’s arm saying, “the Predator” as he pointed at the knight. The man slapped the boy across the face sending him to the ground. The boy looked back at the man then the knight through his tears and the taste of his own blood. He said, “he has a gun on him so do your worst monster.” The man turned around just in time to see the scarlet knight materialize. The man went for his gun, but the knight grabbed the gun as he brought it up. The knight took the gun as well as the finger in the trigger guard smashing the man’s hand in the process. A shot rang out than another. The first man from the corner was on the other side of the fence shooting at the knight. Bill pulled a knife and tossed it at the man on the other side of the fence. The pummel struck him between the eyes knocking him out. The other man pulled out a bigger envelope and tossed some of the drugs into the knight’s face. Blinded, the knight stepped back and brought up his arms. As he did, a sword appeared in his hands pointing upward. In a quick movement, he brought the sword down striking something. The drug around his eyes dissipated
enough to show he struck and killed the boy. The man was covered in the boy’s blood. He backed away with his hands up. The knight moved forward at the man raising the sword above his head and in a quick motion dropping the blade down into and through the man’s head.

Bill stepped back as his vision focused in and out than to a razor-sharp focus where he could see the minute imperfections in a nearby window and a fly as it circled over a rotting apple. The man on the other side of the fence was having trouble breathing. The knight stepped over and broke through the fence and over to the man. From a dark place in the alley, Vot whispered, “yes, end him. take his life, be the knight.” A war hammer appeared in the knight’s hand. The knight raised the hammer and brought it down on the man’s head with a crack, and a spattering sound smashing the man’s head into the pavement flattening it into something unrecognizable. Vot pulled out a notebook and made three marks next to the first five. He then vanished back into the shadows. The sounds of the city seemed to amplify as a sound of a car seemed to approach. Soon the knight heard the siren. He dropped the hammer, and it vanished, then he took to the sky leaving the dead behind and a young boy who witnessed it all.
Tina looked over at Brenda who was staring back at her. To help with their protection, the hospital put them in the same room. Brenda asked, “so, do you enjoy screwing my brother?” Tina said, “I don’t know if we should be talking about that.” Brenda asked, “what? You having sex with my brother or you enjoying having sex with my brother?” Tina could feel her face redden. Brenda smiled then she said, “Bill hasn’t had a very easy life, and I want or hope you’re something more than a fuck buddy, and I also know that enjoying sex with someone shows you like them because it’s difficult to fuck someone you hate.” Brenda looked at the door then back to Tina saying, “my first real boyfriend was a total fuckhead who just pumped away racing the clock so he could get back to his game. Sex became something for him and not anything I could enjoy. I eventually dumped him and slept with his best friend who was the best fuck of my life. I don’t know why I broke it off with him? When I did, I broke him, and he never spoke to me again.” Tina said, “he makes me feel something I didn’t understand. I feel safe with him and……yes I enjoy being with him a lot.” Brenda said, “yeah no shit. If you were any more vocal, then everyone on the block would have known.” Tina said, “and just like that I hate you again.” She smiled as she said it showing she didn’t really mean what she said. Tina got out of bed
and made her way to the bathroom mooning Brenda on the way.

Brenda closed her eyes when she reopened them and saw Darren. He seemed to just appear between blinks. Darren seemed taller than before with a bigger build. Darren picked Brenda up by the throat and tossed her into a wheelchair near the bed. He said to her, “scream and I kill you and that bitch in the bathroom.” Brenda looked at the room’s door then the bathroom. She said, “you don’t want to do something you’ll regret. Right now, right here you have a choice to do the right thing.” Darren walked behind the chair and pushed it and her up to the bed until her legs were pinned against the side rail. He said, “I don’t regret killing the twins. In fact, I enjoyed working my way back to being an only child.” In the bathroom, Tina used her phone to record what was happening. Brenda thought about her brother and sister. She said, “I don’t believe you.” Darren became the silver knight. Brenda saw the flash of silver just before Darren drew his sword and ran her through. The blade struck the mattress going deep into the fill. Darren said, “I don’t care what you believe.”

The sword vanished, and Brenda’s body fell forward. In a motion much too quick for someone in
armor, the silver knight ripped the bathroom door off its hinges and pulled Tina out. He pulled her up and ripped the hospital gown off her. The metal gauntlets cut and bruised her skin. He said, “I should fuck you to death.” Just outside he could hear a commotion. Darren let Tina go, then he punched her in the stomach forcing her to her knees. Darren brought up his hands over his head as the sword formed in his hands. Tina felt like she was stuck in place unable to move. Darren brought the blade down. In a desperate act of self-preservation, Tina brought her hands up to block the sword. As she did a glimmer of gold appeared all around her. Darren’s sword struck the gold gauntlets of the gold knight. Tina squeezed the blade in her hands warping and twisting it out of shape. Darren stepped back as Tina stood up. Her armor was a gleaming 24k gold with a raised relief of an infinity symbol across the chest. Tina looked at the armor on her hands then to Darren who lost his armor. He went to the door and went out. As he did, Tina turned back into her naked self. She grabbed her gown and went to Brenda as the sounds of police screaming came from the hall, and people came into their room. Sounds and fury that came too late for Brenda.
Chapter Eleven

Bill woke up in an open field near a series of snow-capped mountains. The sun was out, and the day was warm with a clean, crisp, fresh breeze coming from the mountains. He looked around with no idea of where he was just that he wasn’t in Ohio. Off in the distance, he could see something big flying around one of the snowcaps. It moved like a snake in the air. Bill thought about the Chinese Dragons and just how they moved. Bill turned and saw a man walking toward him. The man was massive, maybe over seven foot tall. His feet were bare and seemed like they had never seen a pair of shoes. He had a basket with what looked like food inside. The man came to a stop in front of Bill and smiled a warm and noticeably forced smile. Something about this man said he rarely ever smiled. He said, “welcome stranger to the garden. We didn’t think that anyone would come here after Thomas.”

Bill looked around then back to the giant and asked, “where am I?” The giant lowered the food and looked at Bill. He said, “I just told you…. I knew this was going to be hard but…. OK…. this is the land of Daichi Asai and his family called the garden.” Bill asked, “my name is Bill and what can I call you?” The Giant said, “my name is something you won’t understand or might have a preconceived notion about
it so I won’t say it now. You can call me Musuko.” He sat down so he could look Bill in the eyes without any difficulty. He said, “this is a special place made just for Daichi Asai as a reward for his service, but that’s not my story to tell.” Off in the distance, Bill could see a man with two young children. The man was holding the children back as they fought to get to Bill. Musuko said, “I can see you're a knight and are here on a quest. One you might not understand yet. When you do, I'll help you as much as I can but for now, wake up.” Bill vanished just as the two children got free from their father and made their way to the giant. Daichi Asai asked, “Cain, who was that?” Cain said, “maybe redemption.”

Bill woke up on a roof nearly rolling off. He stood up and saw he was on the roof of his parent’s garage. The sun was coming up, and there were red and blue lights in the driveway. He snuck to the edge and looked over seeing his mother hugging his father as the police told them something that was bad. Bill let the armor take him and used it to sneak past his parents and into his room. The door was closed, and it seemed that it hadn’t been opened since they left for the hospital. He changed back and changed into some street clothes just in case they had to go. He walked out only to find they left leaving a note, “Bill we are going to the hospital. Something has happened, and we
need you to stay here for now. The police will be outside watching for Darren and if he calls, tell the police.” Bill went to the phone and called Tina, but a stranger answered, “hello…… Who is this?” Bill asked, “can I speak to Tina?” The voice said, “NO and when I ask a question boy I expect an answer.” Bill hung up the phone and went to the door where he was stopped by the police. The officer said, “I don’t know where you think you’re going but just get back inside because you’re not going anywhere.”

Bill stepped back and asked, “what’s going on?” The officer said, “that’s not my job. Go back into the house, or I’ll put you in.” Bill went back into the house and picked up the phone calling Brenda but instead of his sister answering it was Darren, “so is this mom, dad or fuckhead?” Bill asked, “what are you doing with Brenda’s phone?” Darren said, “ahh fuckhead and I guess they didn’t tell you yet…… our dear sweet sister is having a bad day and your little bitch .... Well somethings just suck for you.” Bill asked, “what have you done?” Darren disconnected the phone. Bill went to his window only to find an officer standing there. He wondered if he changed and snuck by would the police find out and what would happen. Then the phone rang. Bill picked up and asked, “Hello?” The voice on the other side said, “Bill…. Oh my god…… thank god it’s you, and you’re ok.” Bill
recognized Tina’s voice and asked, “what’s going on? Are you alright? Why do the police have your phone? Is Brenda with you?” Tina went silent. Bill asked, “Hello?”

Tina didn’t know what to say. It was clear that no one told Bill what was happening. His brother killed Brenda, Jennifer, and Jason. Bill was next, and no one warned him. Tina said, “I am going to ask if they will take me to you. I don’t want to say this over the phone.” Bill stared into the kitchen wondering what could be so bad that she didn’t want to say over the phone. After more than a few seconds he said, “be safe.” She disconnected the call and went to the officer stationed outside her door. She said, “I need to go and see my boyfriend before someone tells him about his sister.” The officer said, “Miss Casado you are safer here.” Tina asked, “do you have a sister?” The officer said, “yes, I have six sisters.” Tina famed a smile and asked, “whom would you want the news that one of them killed the other five from, a stranger or your girlfriend?” The officer looked to the right down the hall then the left. He said, “I don’t know if I would ever want to know that, but I would rather hear it from my husband than a stranger.” Tina put her hand out and said, “please, call me Tina.” The officer took her hand saying, “call me Jerry....... Let’s go.” Jerry and Tina made their way to his car and were off on their rule-
breaking trip to see Bill, but breaking the rules was nothing new for Jerry.

Tina asked, “really your husband’s name is Tom as in Tom and Jerry?” Jerry said, “we met in court. I was testifying about an arrest I made in a park for indecent exposure, and Tom was representing the perv.” Tina all at once realized she was just in a hospital gown that was open in the back. She asked, “that must have been an interesting way to meet the love of your life?” Jerry replied, “yeah, we went from court that morning to lunch a few days after the case ended. From there it just sped up, and when the law changed I came out and we married.” Jerry asked, “do you want to stop at your house and put something else on?” Tina said, “if we stop at home my parents won’t let me leave, and they might call your supervisors demanding you get fired.” Jerry replied, “so not stopping then…. OK.” Jerry asked, “how long have you two been together?” Tina said, “it’s only been a month or two, but I think I loved him since I first saw him in the first grade. I just never had the confidence to say anything to him.” Jerry looked back at Tina using the mirror and said, “I couldn’t imagine you not having confidence.”
Tina and Jerry pulled into the driveway, and Tina got out and ran to the house. The officer stationed at the door watched her taking in the open gown and Tina’s ass as she passed. Jerry met with the other officer saying, “she wanted to break the news in person before he saw it on television.” The other officer said, “OK, whatever Jenny I just watch the door. I don’t care.” It had been a few years since he came out but many like this asshole were still calling him things like Jenny or officer backdoor. Tina nearly knocked Bill down as they came together. She said, “I have to tell you something that you won’t want to hear, but I think, no I know you need to know.” Jerry watched as Tina told Bill about his sisters and brother. Afterward, she hugged Bill, but Bill just stood there staring off at a wall filled with pictures. The pictures were of his family including one of the one-year-old Brenda and an older Darren. She was just in a diaper and Darren was in orange overalls and a white shirt. They were both smiling with the text, “Big Brother is Watching” printed below on the frame. The other officer said, “hey now don’t add peeping perv to your lifestyle...... officer in-a-dress.” Jerry asked, “you do know there are women on the force, right?” The other officer said, “yeah, I’m looking at one.” Jerry just shook his head and turned back to the two teenagers in the house. They were on the floor with Tina hugging Bill as he cried. While on the ground Tina’s gown open and her ass was hanging out. From behind him,
Jerry heard, “*now that is one fine ass. It’s a shame she’s jailbait.*” Jerry turned to the other officer and asked, “*now who’s the perv?*”

Darren made his way to an abandoned house near the river. He was one of the wealthiest men in the world and was on the run. The house was on the auction block by the sheriff’s department for back taxes. The owner murdered his neighbor after he cut too far into his yard. Like so many, he was on Darren’s drug Greek Fire. The power and water were off, and the smell of rotten food was everywhere. Darren went for his phone then realizing they could trace it he turned it off then broke the phone in half. He turned into the silver knight and tried to think about his castle on the other side, but he found himself still in the house. A light formed on his left and a man came out of the light. He was shirtless with a runner’s body and large feathered wings on his back. The light went out, but the man was illuminated with an aura of white and yellow light. The man said to Darren, “*my name is Adriel, and I am here to help you king Darren.*” Darren felt a change in his armor, so he went to find a mirror. In a bedroom, he found a mirror and saw that he now had a gold and silver crown and a gold cross on his chest with a white fur cape with gold and silver trim.
He came out of the room as Adriel went to a knee and said, “I was sent to help you go back to your kingdom.” Darren let the armor vanish and turned to the angel saying, “I don’t want to go. My kingdom is right here.” Vot stepped out from behind the angel and said, “if you stay here you will be in hiding for the rest of your life. Here you are a wanted man, but back there you are the king and wanted for a very different reason.” Darren said, “you knew this was going to happen. You knew I would lose everything.” Vot shook his head saying, “I had nothing to do with you killing your siblings.” Vot thought about Cain and how he did the same thing. He continued saying, “you did that, and now you have to face what you did or go with us and be like a god to your subjects.” Darren smiled at the words “like a god.” Darren asked, “what about my business?” Vot said, “that’s what Jacks is for. He will run the day-to-day while you rule the real world.” Darren turned back into the silver king and vanished into a bright light. When he was gone the angel changed into a monstrous thing with dark leathery skin hunched over with long greasy gray and black hair. The Deceiver asked Vot, “just how long are we going to have to put up with that fucktard?” Vot said, “that Fucktard is the new king for now so watch your tongue, or I’ll take it. He will be the king until the Nazi is out then we will toss him into either hell or the void.”
As Darren materialized in his castle, the people around him went to their knees including the black, purple and blue knights. Darren waved the blue knight over and asked, “who are the other two knights?” William said, “when the word went out that you were here to take control of the kingdom away from the false Nazi king they came to join, and more are on the way.” The Black knight walked over to Darren and went to his knees before him. He said in a thick Spanish accent, “I pledge my sword and my life to the true king of heaven.” Darren told him to rise and as he did Darren put a hand on his shoulder. He said, “as of right now you are a knight of the new kingdom.” When Darren pulled his hand away a ghost image of his hand in silver stayed marking this knight as one of his. Darren did the same to the blue and purple knight. Darren kept walking until he was in his throne room. The basic throne was gone replaced by a white marble throne with veins of silver running throughout. To the left and right were smaller seats made from the same stone making a semi-circle onto a black marble floor with the same silver veins. Darren sat down and called for his knights. He told the blue knight to take his right and the black to take the left side. He then ordered the purple to go out and find more knights to choose the right side.
Bill offered Tina a pair of sweatpants and a shirt. He went into his room to get the clothes and Tina followed him. In the room, she dropped the gown and hugged him from behind. Bill could feel her naked body against his and grew aroused. He turned around and kissed her. Bill said, “I don’t know what is right or wrong anymore all I do know is I love you, and that has to be right.” Tina unbuckled his belt and let his pants drop. She said, “I love you too and as for anything else let me help you see what is right and wrong.” She took hold of him and said, “I want you.” They made their way to the bed where they started to make love as if all else didn’t happen. Outside of the house, the other officer said, “they have been in that room for too long. I think we need to stop that right now.” He went for the doorknob, but Jerry stopped him putting a hand on the other’s wrist saying, “no you’re not stopping anything. Whatever is going on in there, it’s between them and not against the law.” The other officer said, “first let go of my wrist then I am going to stop them, and that is that.” Jerry said, “go in there, and I’ll show the video and audio of you staring at a teenage girl’s ass.” Over the radio, a voice said, “we found him so anyone on protection detail can go back to their regular assignments.”

Nancy sat next to the body of her daughter Brenda as Frank sat in the corner of the room staring
out a window. Neither of them said anything to each other ever since they got the word about the first attack then the murder. Nancy thought about how she would never speak to Brenda again. How she could never take back her words or actions. How petty everything she said to her was and how she would take it all back and even give her life to have one more day with her. About an hour ago the police said they found Darren’s body in an abandoned home near the river. There were no signs of how he died just that he was dead. A large black man came into the room. Terence saw Brenda and her parents and wanted to scream at them and at the world. He was not so secretly in love with Brenda, but he didn’t want to come out and say he was and ruin his reputation. Frank saw him and knew who he was while Nancy didn’t seem to notice anything at all. Terrance stepped out of the room and made a call for all his employees to meet at the club. He wanted to find Jacks and make him pay.

Bill and Tina lay naked in his bed as the clock ticked away. Tina got up and put on one of Bills shirts. She went into the kitchen for a glass of water when she came face to face with Nancy who was sitting at the kitchen table. She asked, “just how long have you and my son been having sex?” Tina felt caught and very naked, but she also felt an inner strength. She said, “not very long but I prefer to call it making love
because I love him.” Nancy took a drink of something that while clear was not water and said, “that’s nice. I’m glad he found someone that loves him openly. I know both of us could have been better parents. I let my love for my husband blind me to just how bad he was treating our children, and now I’m paying the price.” Nancy poured a small amount of the vodka into a glass and added a little lime juice to it. She slid the glass over to Tina and said, “it’s OK and as far as I’m concerned what you two do together as adults is your business.” Tina took a drink of the mixture. First, the acidic taste of the lime hit her then the slight hint of something almost antiseptic like. Nancy said, “I think my marriage is over. He blames me for kicking her out, and I blame him for stealing her future. I shut my eyes to what he was doing and sucked his dick when he wanted. How could I not see just what kind of man he was?” Nancy got up and kissed Tina on the forehead. Then she left the room. Tina downed the rest of her drink not even feeling the effects until she got back into bed with Bill. She kissed him on the cheek and whispered, “I wish I could take you out of all this because this isn’t over yet.”

Bill woke up in a room that resembled a high-rise apartment in a steel and glass building. He looked out and saw he was in the castle keep. He could see his old house, but he had no intention of going back. The
apartment was a mix of midcentury modern all white and gray with a hint of scarlet here and there. On one wall was a life-size painting of Tina with long hair wearing a white dress that was partially clinging to her body revealing the outline of her womanly form. There was a knock at the door when it opened before Bill could say anything. Hendrick walked in and saw both Bill and the painting. Bill went to one knee. Hendrick said, “now my boy that’s not necessary. All my knights stand before me.” Hendrick looked at the painting and asked, “is that your girl back in America?” Hendrick knew who she was after watching them make love more than once using the curved glass in his room. Bill said, “she is more than just that I just don’t know how I can tell her about this.” Hendrick said, “when the time is right she will learn about everything, and it will all work out, but for now its best if she doesn’t know.”

Tina walked down a street that was a mix of medieval times meets New York City. She was in a pair of tan riding pants and something that reminded her of a pirate’s shirt and dark brown high heel boots. She had on a white cavalier hat with gold trim and a scarlet feather. She thought that this was the weirdest dream she ever had. On the outskirts of town, she could see a tall stone wall like from the anime Titan which was used to keep large man-eating giants out. In the center of the mishmash of styles was a tall curving
tower. Tina felt something both strange and familiar. Her hair was back and hanging in a braid down her back braided with a gold ribbon. As she walked a young man approached her and said, “my lady I am Bobby, and I am your squire while you are here so just tell me what you want and it’s yours.” Tina said, “show me around and tell me everything you know about this place.” Bobby bowed then he put out his hand for her and said, “I will tell you and show you all that I know.” Nearby Vot watched as the Deceiver took Tina by the hand and escorted her around telling her what he was supposed to say while leaving out what Vot didn’t want her to know.

When Darren finished meeting with his subjects, he made his way to his chambers where he found six women in cheerleader outfits waiting for him. None of them were over the age of nineteen, and all of them had skirts that would be banned by most if not all schools and revealing vests or tank tops. Next to them was Vot. He said, “these girls want the honor of servicing the king.” One of the girls had thick curly red hair. She was curvy in all the right places and showing enough flesh to start a riot. Darren pointed at her and said, “let’s start with you.” He held out his arms, and the other girls undressed him. They did this as if they did it every night even though this was the first time they ever had laid eyes on him. The one Darren
pointed at started to undress when he said, “no, I want to unwrap my present.” She stopped and said, “may I be the best gift you ever had.” One of the girls gasped as they made their way to his underwear and the size of his genitals. Darren looked down and saw that as king his penis was larger than before. Now that he was naked he said, “that will be all for now.” Darren walked over to the girl. She said, “please be gentle. I’m a virgin.” Darren ripped her vest open revealing her chest. He then grabbed her by her right breast and said, “don’t tell your king what to do.” He pushed her into the bed and climbed on top and began to savagely penetrate her as she desperately tried not to scream.

In her life before all this Brandy Scott was a cheerleader and heroin addict going to school in Norton, Ohio. One day desperate for a fix she shot a man for his car. A police chase ended with her upside down in a rain runoff ditch in just enough water to drown in. When she died she found herself in her high school surrounded by the people she thought were her friends, but none of them had faces. Every day at the stroke of twelve the faceless people would take hold of her and stab her with needles then push her face into a well-used toilet. This went on for what felt like forever and not just ten weeks. When she thought it wouldn’t end, she was taken out of her private hell and taken to the castle where she was told that if she does as she is
told she would never have to go back. Brandy still had the taste of shit in her mouth and the need to never see that place again, so she went with Vot and became a part of Darren’s kingdom and harem. Even as the unnaturally large Darren tried to fuck his way through her, Brandy knew this was better than drowning in shit.

Jacks sat on his favorite street corner watching the school girls walk to school. He remembered how all the girls back in the day would hang on his every word like he was a master storyteller weaving magical tales of old when in reality he just offered the kind of high they wanted. Most of the girls wore either shorts or short skirts even as the days grew short and the temperatures grew cold. He knew that some of these girls would offer themselves up for what he was selling because some of them did. As he watched the girls someone watched him. Jasper James was known as Double J or just JJ and worked for Terrance. His job was to act as a gofer as in go for this and go for that. That morning he was ordered to watch Jacks and record everything he does. He recorded Jacks selling drugs and stare at teenage girls. JJ also has a video of this man taking a girl that had to be around fifteen or sixteen from behind as payment for his offerings. JJ lost his mother to heroin and his brother to a shootout with a neighbor over the man’s right to get high and beat on his wife.
Tina couldn’t help noticing how people stared and pointed at Bill as he went down the hall at school. He was never a popular person, but now he was almost a tragic character in a biblical tale. She knew that for some reason teenagers liked to heap grief and misery on others kicking them when they are down. It wouldn’t take long before Bill became a punchline than a punching bag. She also noticed that Bill seemed to know this was happening and had stayed away from her as if he was trying to shield her from his unpopularity. As she thought about all this, she felt a strange tingling feeling in her hands and feet. She made her way to the bathroom just as she changed into the gold knight. The armor was a little more formfitting than before with a fit that was like the red knight she met in the park. She thought, “how am I going to get out of here like this?” As she thought that the armor vanished. Tina looked at her hands then thought about Bill. She walked out of the bathroom and up to Bill spinning him around. People stopped and watch thinking his trashing was about to start when Tina pulled him close and kissed him on the lips. She whispered to him, “we are in this together no matter what.”
The mood of the school seemed to change for Bill as he gained a little of Tina’s popularity which gave the student body the ability to show him some compassion. After school, they made their way down into the park to their favorite spot. The weather was changing showing signs of an early snow. Bill sat on the bench as Tina climbed into his lap meeting Bill face to face. She kissed him, and he kissed back. Bill stared into her eyes and said, “*how could someone like you want to be around someone like me?*” Tina whispered into his ear, “*it’s mostly charity. Yes, charity and that large throbbing thing pressing up against my thigh.*” Tina looked around to see if they were truly alone then she unzipped Bill’s pants while lifting her own skirt. She whispered to Bill, “*I love you, and that’s why...... you fucking idiot.*” Off in the distance, Vot watched as the two teens made love in the park. He knew that their bond could hurt his mission or what was his old mission.

Hendrick turned the image off on the curved glass in his room. He said, “*watching two children play grab-ass in the park is boring.*” He waved his right hand, and a servant came into his chamber. She was maybe twenty-five with a full chest and ample curves. Hendrick sat on the end of his bed and said to her, “*just how much do you want to serve your king, my child?*” Vanessa Sauer smiled and stepped out of her skirt then
her dress showing her body to the king. She said, “I want to serve your Majesty in any position you could desire.” Hendrick stood up and with a wave of his hands ordered his servants to remove his armor than his clothes. He took Vanessa by the face, pulled her close and whispered, “serve me well and just maybe you’ll earn a reward worth more than gold.” Hendrick laid back into the bed as Vanessa slid down off the bed and took him into her mouth. This went on for a few minutes until she stopped and got on top of him. Hendrick in a movement that seemed too quick to be natural spun her around until she was on her knees and he was behind her. Hendrick whispered, “you don’t stop until I say.” He then proceeded to take her from behind. Vanessa tried not to scream thinking about herself as queen and what happened to the others that didn’t please him.

Darren lay naked on his bed with four of the cheerleaders around him and a fifth on top grinding away. Not in his wildest high school dreams did he ever think he would have an entire squad at his sexual disposal. As a dealer, he had a cheerleader here and there but never all at once. Darren came inside her, and she fell to his left side near two of the other girls. He thought about this girl he knew back in high school. Megan Smith was the captain of her squad and the hottest girl in school. She would never have anything
to do with him until he was able to provide her with what a growing body needed. He helped her to get hooked on heroin as he had his way with her. Eventually, the thrill of having her went away as she deteriorated, and he eventually gave her a batch laced with fentanyl. She died in her room one month pregnant with a needle in her arm. Darren knew the baby was his even as someone else took the credit. One of the girls in the bed with him watched as he grew hard yet again. Off in the corner of the room was the youngest of the girls. The last girl on the bed waved her over and said, “it’s your turn.”

Bill waited for dark before going out as the knight. He made his way along east to west Market street looking for trouble but finding none. From there he made his way to the park along the river. Near there he saw a guy standing on a corner just outside the park. The man was just standing there seemingly minding his own business when a teenage boy walked up to him and said something. The guy made a gesture with his hands that could only mean money. The boy gave him a wad of cash, but the man didn’t seem happy. As the knight got closer, he could hear the man say, “no fucking way, I want my money you fucking little shit.” The man grabbed the boy while saying, “if you can’t pay then don’t make the bet.” He struck the boy in the gut nearly doubling him over. The boy said, “I can get
the rest I just need some time.” The boy did his best to stand up. The man looked him over and said, “just maybe you can pay me now.” He grabbed the boy by the neck and dragged him into the park. The boy took a wild swing at the man that didn’t connect with anything. The man said, “I was going to let you suck your debt away but know I think I’ll just kill you.” The man pulled a large knife and brought it back to stab the boy. The knight caught the hand with the knife as he materialized in front of the two. The man let go of the boy, and he slipped into the dark and out of the park not stopping until he was under his bed. The knight squeezed the man’s hand feeling the bones break. He then stepped on the man’s calf feeling another break.

The knight let the man go as he brought up his sword to deliver the final blow when a person in gold armor stepped between the man and the knight. The knight brought the blade down, but the gold knight caught the blade in her left hand. She said, “this man deserves his day in court.” The scarlet knight stepped back taking in this new knight. It was definitely a she with curves and sexuality that seemed to make its way through the armor. The scarlet knight said, “this doesn’t concern you. I’m here to stop these people.” The gold knight shot back, “where were you when that man killed his brother and two sisters? Where were you during nine eleven?” The Gold knight drew her
sword and said, “I guess I’m here to stop you.” Bill stepped back. As he did his sword formed in his hand. Vot watched as this one in a million-chance happened. The chance they would meet up on opposite sides of a fight. For Vot’s plans to work, he needed them both alive. The scarlet knight swung striking the gold knights sword sending it flying. He then tried to strike the armor of the gold knight, but she vanished before his eyes.

Tina opened her eyes to find she was no longer in the park with the strange knight. She was in a field near a series of tall snow-capped mountains. A large animal was flying around the mountain like a snake in the air. Something moved just outside her field of vision on her right. She looked down and saw a three-foot-tall man in a sparkly pink dress with white elbow length gloves, and a large pink beehive style wig. The dress had a long slit up the side showing plenty of Vot’s hairy leg. Vot started to dance around as a vague 1950’s rock style music started up all around her. Vot slipped and fell to the ground. He came back up in an iridescent white suit. He asked, “just how do you dance in those things?” Tina looked around trying to figure out where she was. Vot said, “yeah, don’t bother this place is as far from your home as the earth is to heaven.” Tina went for her sword only to see her armor was gone. She was in a simple white cotton sundress
with tan open-toe sandals. From what she could tell she wasn’t wearing a bra or a pair of panties.

Vot took a bow and said, “my name is Vot.” Tina asked, “what?” Vot replied, “no…… Vot.” He put his hand behind his back and came back with a name tag with V.O.T. printed across underneath the words, “My Name Is.” Vot smiled and said, “I brought you here because you aren’t ready to face the scarlet knight yet.” Tina put her hands at her sides and said, “I was holding my own.” Vot laughed then he said, “you can lie to yourself all you want little missy, but right here, right now we both know better. You have the armor but not the skills. To gain those skills you will need to open the book.” Tina frowned at the words “little missy” then she thought about the book. She asked, “what book?” Vot said, “you are a good soul so don’t spot it with lies. You dam well know what book I am talking about. The boy has it in his closet sitting idle. Open the book and the knowledge will find you helping you become the gold knight while gaining the ability to fight for honor.” Tina said, “honor is for suckers and stupid people who want to die for something that has no value.” Vot smiled and said to himself, “I like this girl.”
Vot told her he would send her back to her backyard away from the scarlet knight and safe. He warned her to stay away from him until she has all her power, or the knight will kill her before she can take her place as the gold knight. She turned to him to protest when she found he was gone, and she was facing the back of her house. She checked her phone, and it was midnight. She would have to get up soon to go to school. She went inside and changed for bed. All the while she thought about the strange little man and the scarlet knight. She also thought about the book and why does Bill have it. Thinking about Bill made her miss him. If she could, she would go to sleep with him and wake in the morning beside him. Tina closed her eyes and found herself back in that strange city in an open-air market surrounded by the Hustle and bustle of a city in transition. She walked around until she found a house that wasn’t like the rest. As a child, she would draw what she thought of as her dream house. Over time it became a colonial made with pink quartz and a red door. Somehow, she knew this was hers, and she was home.

Bill woke in the house he shared with Nadia. The place was still empty with just the stains from where she died on the wood floor. He thought about her and what she went through. He also thought about how he did nothing to avenge her death. Everyone he
cared about was dying around him. He said to himself, "I let this go unanswered for far too long." Bill stood, and the armor formed on him. Not knowing why he was doing this, Bill touched the blood stain. The dark stain colored the fingers of his right gauntlet staining them. He knew this was a mark he would mix with the blood of those that killed her. He would go after the silver knight and deal with him then his brother who unbeknownst to Bill were one in the same. He would then deal with whomever this gold knight was. Bill said, "I pledge to cut down those that do wrong and deal justice." Vot smiled and whispered, "and now for the war."
Chapter Twelve

Jacks zipped up his fly as he walked out of the alley onto the sidewalk a couple of minutes later and a girl came out of the alley. She didn’t look around as she left she just left as fast as she could without trying to be noticeable. Jacks fished something out of his pocket. He saw that he had her ripped panties. He would add them to his growing collection of depravity he was amassing back in the castle. He liked it when the preppy girls came sniffing around for a fix. First, they offer cash then as the drug took hold of them they offered ass. Even as their classmates go insane on the drug, they keep coming. With the S.A.T.s coming he had more juniors and seniors on their knees earning their fix. Jacks saw a couple of men in a van across the street from him. These men were there the day before, and something told him to find another place to be. The two men looked at each other then they got out and made their way to the alley.

Jacks felt for his gun in the back. He had a silver 1911 with gold hardware and a pair of ivory grips. The Jack of Spades was engraved into the slide and the grips. He turned the corner and found himself in a dead-end alley. The two men met up with four others coming from the other side of the alley just in case Jacks went for the other end. Terence came up
behind his men. He had a Holland & Holland Royal over and under shotgun loaded with OO buckshot. At the end of the alley, they found Jacks standing underneath a dead-end sign. In one hand he had his gun, and in the other, he had a Bowie knife. Then Jacks did something that made no sense. He dropped the magazine on his gun and worked the slide removing the live round. Then he buried the knife into a nearby wall. Terence said to one of his men, “break this fucks legs.” The man came at Jacks with a baseball bat. Jacks caught the bat with his left hand and broke it with his right. He then took the broken bat and struck the man so hard they could hear his skull crack.

Not waiting for orders two of them fired at the unarmed Jacks, but the rounds bounced off the wall behind him. In a move much too fast to see, Jacks took hold of one of the gunmen and broke his arm snapping the Radius and Ulna turning the gun back at the man and blowing his head off. Jacks then caught the other man and spun his head around a full 360 degrees. One man tried running away only to find Jacks standing in front of him blocking the way. Jacks said, “you didn’t trap me, I led you here.” He then drove his fist into the man’s chest and out the other side. The remaining three opened fire trying to empty their guns into this force of unnatural nature. One round bounced off the street and caught Terence in the knee. As he went
down, he saw Jacks break the arm of his last man and push the bone out. He then used the broken arm to sever the man’s throat. Terence went for the small 380 automatic he carried in his pocket, but the gun was gone. He left it in his car. Jacks came up with the Holland & Holland in his hands. He aimed at Terence saying, “this is far too nice a gun to waste on the likes of you boy.” Jacks kicked Terence’s wounded knee. He then re-aimed the gun this time at Terence’s genitals. Jacks smiled and said, “no it can’t be…… Little Terry Towel?” As a boy, Terence made some money washing cars. He was nicknamed Terry Towel for the towel he carried on his shoulder just in case someone wanted a wash. Terence knew but still didn’t or couldn’t believe that this was the man he saw die all those years ago.

Jacks cocked the gun and pointed it at Terence’s face. That is when the moment happened. It would be something he would talk about for years from then onto his final years in a nursing home. A glimmer of red and a scarlet blade running through Jacks' chest almost hitting Terence. Jacks hand spasmed firing the gun harmlessly into a wall. The blade was pulled away from him tossing his body against the wall. Jacks fell with an unnatural bend where the blade cut him in half. He looked at the wound, but he couldn’t move his arms or legs. In a
whisper Jacks asked, “how?” Instead of answering, the scarlet knight swung and cut Jack’s head off just below the chin. His head bounced down the alley. The knight used his sword and cut at Jacks body until he found the heart. When the heart was free, the body vanished. Terence watched as the knight put the heart in his left hand and jammed two fingers of his right into the heart. A red glow emanated from the heart then the heart was gone. The knight looked to Terence and said the words Terence would repeat until his dying day at the age of ninety-seven, “some people should just remain dead where they belong.” The knight jumped into the air and flew away.

Bill landed about three blocks away changing back into himself. He was certain that Jacks was the man that killed Nadia but when he touched his heart, he couldn’t see the attack. He did, however, see the attack on his sister at the club. Jacks death wasn’t in vain, but it did leave a lot of questions unanswered. He could see the silver knight but not his face. He could also see the blue knight as well as a knight in purple. The heart had vanished before he could see more. The silver knight had a crown and was wearing a fur cape. Bill took off again flying home landing in the backyard. No one was home. His dad moved out when his mother was at work. They gave her time off, but she turned it down because she couldn’t see staying at
home and she didn’t want to see Frank. Where she was now, Bill had no idea. Bill went down into the room where the twins had nailed themselves inside after eating an acid-laced cake. It had seemed like only a few days ago when that happened, and it didn’t seem real that he would never see any of them again.

Jacks woke up in a hallway that seemed familiar to him. He soon realized he was in his old high school. Looking down, he could see he was in a dress and had tiny nub like breasts. Jacks went into a bathroom and found a mirror. Looking back at him was a teenage girl with a face covered in acne, with long black greasy hair in pigtails. He had braces that looked like they were props from the Saw movies. Jacks felt like his skin was on fire with an itch that was driving him mad. Most of all his arms itched. Jacks soon realized that as a she, Jacks was a junkie and needed a fix. Three boys came into the room. The first two were new but Jacks knew the third. Jacks watched as his younger-self walked in. Suddenly he remembered this moment in his life. Jacks tried to get away, but the other two stopped him just like they did back there and then. His younger-self said, “Hold her over the sink. I think this little slut wants to earn her candy.” He struggled, but the two boys were bigger. His younger-self pulled his skirt up and panties down. Jacks didn’t know that his own hell would be having to
see the world from the point of view of his victims. He would cycle from victim to victim feeling the hell he sold to them.

Darren came out of his chambers in his armor and crown with a swagger of self-importance that only a king could comport. He was running late for a meeting, but he didn’t care. He would say that a king is never late for anything. The throne room was filled with people except for the one person that was supposed to be there. Everyone bowed as he entered and stayed down until Darren sat down. The Blue knight went to one knee and said, “most horrible news your majesty. The one known as Jacks was murdered by the scarlet knight in an alley. The cowardly dog cut him into pieces.” William fought back a smile as he said this news. Darren gave him a confused look then he asked, “how do you kill a ghost?” William said, “I do not know.” Darren replied, “I wasn’t talking to you.” The hem of a woman’s dress near the king opened, and Vot stepped out. The woman’s dress split the rest of the way up and off her body. She tried to run when Darren ordered her to return where she was. She went back and stood there naked as Vot said, “That entrance made more sense in my head than between her legs.” Darren tapped his finger on his throne. Vot sensed Darren’s growing anger. Vot said, “like a knight, your brother, as well as yourself, can
eliminate ghosts on the other side. That is the ghosts that we free and work for us.’’ Darren stopped tapping and sneered ‘‘so just go and get him back before I lose my business.’’

Darren stormed over to Vot saying, ‘‘I am your king, and you will do as I say.’’ The people in the throne room left except for the naked woman who was seemingly stuck in place. Once everyone was gone, Vot grew from his three-foot tall stature to that of an eight-foot-tall monster. The woman gasped at the sight of him in his real form. Vot said to her, ‘‘temptation is an ugly thing.’’ He then pushed Darren back and down onto his ass. He said to Darren, ‘‘you are not my king. I serve something bigger than anything you could comprehend. Push me, and I’ll find another fool to dance about and play at being important.’’ Darren stood back up and went to his throne. It seemed smaller than before this day. Vot said, ‘‘there are some rules I can’t break, and one of them is that once someone is sent back to hell, you can’t get them back.’’ Darren looked over at the naked woman then back to Vot who had changed back into his usual self. Darren asked, ‘‘when can I finish making myself an only child?’’ Vot smiled and said, ‘‘soon.’’ Darren looked back at the naked woman. She wasn’t his tastes and didn’t want her. Vot said, ‘‘do what you want with her just remember she saw me school you.’’
Bill closed his eyes and found himself in his new apartment in the keep. On a table in what must have been the dining room, Bill found some files and pictures of the castle where the mysterious silver knight resided. He spent the rest of the night reading everything he could on what they knew about the silver knight’s kingdom. He woke to sounds from the other room. He could hear his mother moan and the bed creak. He thought to himself, “well that didn’t take long.” He knew the sounds of his parent’s favorite activity. Bill got out of bed and went to the bathroom. On his way back, he heard his mother say, “fuck me, fuck me hard George, fuck me.” the wall rattled then it became silent. A few minutes later and his father’s brother George came out of his parent’s room. Bill hadn’t seen George in many years, but he still looked the same. George was just in a pair of boxers that were just a little too low on his body showing a mess of pubic hair and his ass crack. He saw Bill and said, “sucks to be you.” Then he passed Bill and went into the bathroom. Bill went back into his room and tried to think about what he just saw. As he sat in his bed, there was a light knock at the door. His mother came into the room wearing a robe. She glistened with sweat and smelled just as Bill thought she would after doing what she was doing.
Nancy sat down across from Bill. Her robe was short, and Bill saw way too much of his mother. She said, “this just happened. I was dating your uncle when we broke up, and I started to date your father. Now that he’s gone we can get back together and have that family we always wanted.” She handed Bill a keycard with a number on it. She said, “this is to a room in a motel down by the river. I want you out by tonight. This will be your place until you turn eighteen then I don’t care where you go.” Bill looked at his mother. She had a stern, unforgiving look on her face. Somehow Bill knew she was blaming him for the sins of his father and just maybe he was a reminder of her own flaws. Either way, he wasn’t welcome there anymore. Bill didn’t say a word he just got up, grabbed a bag and started to pack. Bill waited for his mother to leave before he opened his secret stash with all his money and the gun. His mother was paying for the room, but that was it he was on his own for everything else. Nancy stopped at the door and without turning to Bill said, “you were a mistake, and I wish I had never had you. I could have left your father and been with George, but you got in the way.”

Bill left his home for what could be the last time. He knew that he never wanted to go back or see either of them again. He also didn’t want to see his father. In the last three years of his life that house
stopped being his home and became a place where he could sleep. Bill found the motel and the room. It overlooked a roof that was connected to a parking deck. While it had no view of the river, it was perfect for him and his knightly activities. He bought a pay-as-you-go phone and called Tina. Within an hour Tina was at his door. She said, “I told my parents I was staying at a friend’s house.” She slipped in, and soon there were clothes everywhere with Bill and Tina in the bed having worked up a sweat of their own. Tina asked, “I can’t believe your mother did that. I mean what kind of person acts like that to her child?” Bill lay next to Tina stroking her left breast. He said, “I always knew where I stood with her, but I never knew about her and uncle George.” Tina turned to him and asked, “what about your father?” Bill moved his hand from her breast to her stomach. He said, “nothing has changed. He’s still a bastard, and he will always be one. Losing mom will somehow become my fault and like that he’ll do just what mom did. Fuck them both.” Tina whispered, “enough talk for now.” They spent that Saturday morning making love and not talking about the future or his family.

The Purple Knight

Roy walked down the street trying to take in everything he saw. He was sent to surmise their ability
to invade such a large city. What kind of defenses do they have? How many armed men are there, and do they carry their arms with them? What is the mood of the people? Unlike most of the knights, Roy Stannard didn’t change his looks when he became a knight. He changed his luck and fortitude, but he never thought about how he looked. On his way from the castle to the city he stopped and robbed a man of his clothes so he would blend in with the citizens. He found he couldn’t generate clothing without his signature purple which would stand out among a people who wore basic natural colors. The man had a body odor that was almost unbearable. Roy knew that smell, he wore it for most of his life back on his family’s farm in Iowa.

Roy Adolf Stannard was born in the winter of 1897 to Adolf and Mary Stannard on their farm just outside the small town of Bonn Iowa. He was the ninth and final child of the couple. The community was founded by a large influx of Germans who immigrated into the country in the 1870’s and still had that feel of a small town in Germany rather than an American one. As a child, Roy never stood out and even as the youngest he was just there. Soon the war started, and the community was divided between the people loyal to Germany and those loyal to their new country. Even before America entered the war, Roy was joining wanting to defend his country from what was being
called the Hun menace. His parents told him that if he joined he wasn’t welcome back home. Being born in a German-speaking house, Roy was fluent in the language and would have made a good soldier, but the local recruitment office had a sign saying, “No Germans.” But sign be damned, Roy tried to join. He tried in a couple of cities, but no one was willing to take him. Unable to join and now homeless, Roy sat down in a park and wondered what he would do. That was when everything changed.

A police officer was rousting people from the park that night. He came to Roy, but instead of kicking him out he gave him a five-dollar-bill and told him to get something to eat. The officer had a German accent. Near the park, Roy found a German-American restaurant. Someone had broken a couple of windows which were then covered in boards. Inside the restaurant was nearly empty. He sat down, and a waitress gave him a book rather than a menu. The book was bound in red leather with gold edging. Roy sniffed the gold, and it smelled like metal and fresh apples. Roy looked around only to see the restaurant was empty and had been for a while. He got up and stepped out the door. He turned around only to see a vacant lot rather than the restaurant he was just in. Roy opened the book. A glow formed around him, and he found himself in a set of purple armor. The visor came down
and the city of Berlin, Iowa became a vast wasteland of broken crumbling buildings and long dead bodies. He stepped out into the street and saw American Soldiers still in uniform with weapons next to their broken bodies. Overhead he could see German tri-wing planes.

Roy made his way back home to see if his family would let him stay. Along the way, he would change back into the armor, and he would see the ruin of the country as the German army had made its way from coast to coast. Soon he had stopped changing back and spent all his time in the armor. In that time, he never slept, he just walked and raged. At the outskirts of Bonn, he saw that the town was untouched by the war. A sign proclaimed their loyalty to the Kiser and their German roots. Without the visor, the town seemed just like it was when he left a few days ago but with the visor, he could see that the people had changed into some sort of monstrous form. Roy ducted into an alley as his father passed. He had fangs and horns. A voice in the alley said, “and god slew the wicked wiping clean the vial.” Roy turned and saw a shirtless man with large feather wings. He would know much too late that this was the deceiver but there and then he was an angel. The Deceiver said, “you must destroy the wicked to prevent the end of everything you hold dear.” The town consisted of one main street with most of the buildings running down Main Street in a
tight grouping. Most of them were wood with a brick facade. At one end of the street was the only gas station. Roy dropped his visor and saw an aspect of a different war that wouldn’t happen until the 1940’s. The visor showed him Auschwitz in Poland. He believed this was what would happen if the Germans won, so he had no choice.

Roy waited for night before he struck, taking a truck with a large tank in the back. He filled the tank and filled it with gas. He then pulled out onto Main Street and punctured the tank with his sword driving from one end to the other covering the sidewalks with the gas. He then struck a steel grade with his sword lighting the town on fire. The Dry summer followed by the high-octane gas lit the town up within minutes. People screamed out alarms in both German and English. As people filled the street, he stepped out as the purple knight. The first man he saw started to smile until Roy drew his sword and cut him down. Roy went down the street killing every monster he saw cutting down people he knew all his life. At an old handpump that served as the town’s fire response, Roy found his father. He had leather wings and a tail representing what Roy thought the devil would look like. Roy cut him down along with the other volunteer fireman. When his father died the armor fell away, and Roy could see what he just did. He saw his father’s head at
his feet. Roy sat down with the head in his lap and let the fire that claimed the small town roll over him. He woke for the first time on the other side knowing what it really was and knowing he deserved hell.

Roy followed two of the guards to an armory and saw they had very little in the way of weapons for the citizenry. He knew that this king wanted to keep his power and arming the citizenry could be a threat. As the purple knight and a man with German heritage, Hendrick wanted to befriend him. Roy would just nod as Hendrick would say how they as Germans should be in charge. He learned that this man was responsible for the hellish nightmare he saw in his visions of the future. When Hendrick took power, Roy went to his knees to pacify the new king with one eye on the door and his way out of that man’s sight. The new king in the old castle was an American, and he wanted to stop this Nazi. Roy made a map of the city marking were the weapons were and just how many armed men he could count. On the way out, he saw someone that seemed familiar. He doubled back and saw his father shoveling dirt from a blocked drainage ditch running next to a street. Roy stopped and picked up a shovel. His father didn’t look up he just nodded. Roy started to dig out the ditch with his father. When they were done, he put out his hand looking at Roy for the first time.
Adolf asked, “Roy?......... No, it can’t be? Why are you here?”

Tina passed two men hugging on a street corner near a dugout drainage ditch. She was wearing a white peasant dress with gold threat flowers stitched into the sleeves, a brown apron and brown cape with a hood. With the hood up, she was unrecognizable, but she was still far too clean to fit into this part of the city which was more medieval in comparison to the center. Every eye followed her on her way to the center of town. She stopped and picked up an apple sniffing the stem. She said to the shop owner, “there is nothing like the smell of a freshly picked apple.” She pulled out a silver piece and picked out about seven apples. The shop owner smiled as she looked at the coin. Most people of Tina’s status just took what they wanted, and no one paid in silver. Tina had just paid her for the cost of her entire fruit stand for the total of seven apples. The shop owner gave her a basket and said, “please take this with my compliments and come back anytime.” Tina stopped and bought some more fruit, but she stayed away from any meat questioning its quality.

She passed a house that had a strange vibe. A small child playing with a wooden horse on the stoop said, “the nice lady was killed by the king because he
wanted her man to kill someone.” Tina sat down and gave the boy an apple. He smiled and took a large bite. Tina asked, “who did the king want dead?” The boy looked at her then went back to the apple. He finished chewing then he said, “the king doesn’t tell us nothing. The queen would have never done any of this, but she wasn’t a not see.” The boy took another bite of the apple. Tina asked, “not see, do you mean he’s blind?” The boy shook his head as he drew a lopsided swastika on the ground. Tina said, “Nazi.” The boy shook his head in agreement while never taking his eyes off the basket of apples. He said, “the king and his right-hand the Scarlet Knight is going to war with something called an American in the old castle.” Tina stood at the mention of the scarlet knight. Her mind raced around thinking about his actions and could they be the actions of a Nazi. Tina gave the boy another apple then she left him on the stoop. The boy pocketed the apple and finished the one he was already eating. He ate everything including the core and stem. A man in a hood and cape came from around a corner and gave the boy a silver coin. He said, “good job.”

Tina turned the corner and saw a group of men standing just outside her new house. They were in military uniforms like the Gestapo from world war two. Their leader was in all white with orange trim while the others were in all black with the same orange
trim. She watched as two of them kicked in her door, and the rest followed them inside. Tina saw the Scarlet Knight fly overhead on his way to the center of the city. From a nearby rooftop, Vot watched all this fuming. Whoever ordered this action was hurting his plans for the girl. The men were part of the king’s guards, but Vot knew that the king wouldn’t do something so stupid as interfering in his work. With Tina watching he couldn’t move in and deal with the intruders, and he also knew that Tina didn’t have her training yet and could get hurt or worse if she doesn’t open the book soon. Tina changed into the Gold Knight and started for her door. Vot jumped down and went to block her path. Tina saw the little man running across the street and came to a stop. Vot came up to her and said, “you must read the book.” Vot snapped his fingers, and Tina woke up next to Bill.

Bill woke to find Tina staring out a window across the roof of the nearby building. She was naked with her arms across her chest covering her breasts. Bill got out of bed and walked over to her. Tina saw him and smiled. She said, “if my mom saw me here naked with a naked boy she would ground me until I went into menopause.” Bill put his arm around her from behind and kissed her neck. He whispered into her ear, “let’s not talk about your mom while were naked.” Tina took hold of Bill by the genitals and said,
“I can feel your point. No parent talk in our place.” As soon as she said our place she started to wonder if Bill heard it or was his brain on autopilot. They fell into the bed rolling around until Tina was on top. Bill said, “our place. I like the sound of that.” Bill and Tina rolled around until he was on top and inside her. He said, “I love you.” Tina thrust her pelvis up and said, “I love you.” The two rolled around making love repeating the same thing to each other while not talking about anything else. When they were finished, Tina started to say something, but she stopped. They went from simple flirting to a full sexual relationship in just a few weeks and never really talked about where they were going. Also, about how they weren’t using protection.

Adolf said, “when that man in the tin suit killed me I found myself on a street corner back in my hometown. Your mother and I fled Germany after I stole some money from some people.” Roy said, “dad you stole from a church, yes I know all about it.” Adolf’s face darkened than he said, “they were waiting for me, and every morning they tied me to a stake and burned me alive. I burned for hours then I would wake up on the street again, and it would start again.” Roy said, “about the tin man. He was or is the purple knight and……. I ……. am him.” Roy looked down then back and said, “the book made me think that the world was
being taken over by evil forces and that everyone back home was corrupted.” Adolf said, “you killed your mother and me.” Roy replied while looking down, “and everyone else in town. I burned Bonn to the ground.” Adolf took his shovel and handed it to Roy. He said, “I need you to finish this and do the right thing. I belong back in hell paying for what I did just like you don’t belong here.” Roy asked, “but I killed innocent people?”

Darren sat in his throne fuming about the loss of his business and his friend. He also watched the others looking for Jack’s replacement. Both the purple knight and the blue knight were gone, and their absence was suspicious. A few new knights joined including the black knight, but he seemed lost at the sight of the world as it is now. He watched the other dealers as they started to run out of the product. The first to do so was a dealer in Baltimore, Maryland. Darren watched as a customer beat the man to death with her bare hands. Another dealer tried to supplement the drug with another drug causing more than a few overdoses. Darren changed the glass to see his father at his bank taking possession of his money. It was just a fraction of the money, but it was still hundreds of millions. Frank walked out onto a street in Belmopan, Belize with no intention of ever going back to Ohio. The screen turned to his mother and uncle
George in a bank in Switzerland taking more of his money. Darren picked up his sword and smashed the screen turning to the black knight and screaming, “I want Vot.”

The crowd parted, and Vot walked in. He was wearing an iridescent multicolored suit with a matching bowler hat. About halfway into the throne room he stopped and said to Darren, “clear the room.” Darren stood up and walked over to Vot. He leaned over making sure to not touch him and said, “you don’t give me orders.” Vot smiled while asking, “do you want your subjects to see me own your ass?” Darren straitened out and yelled, “everybody out now.” The room cleared, and Darren shut and locked the doors and windows. He turned to Vot and as nicely as he could ask, “how can I save my empire back home?” Vot said, “that world is no longer your home, and this will be your empire. All you have to do is what I say, and you will be like a god to these people rather than just a minor drug thug.” Darren turned away from Vot then back asking, “a god of hell?” Vot smiled and said, “as much of a god as you want, and you can be that forever.” Darren grinned and asked, “when can I do that? When can I kill Bill.” Vot lost his smile and asked, “Ok, now who’s the Tarantino fan?”
Roy filled in the hole where he buried his father out in the hills overlooking the city. He did as his father wanted and beat him to death with the shovel then he buried the body overlooking the city Adolf grew to love. His father chose to burn in his own hell rather than work for either Darren or Hendrick. When he was finished filling in the hole, Roy sat next to the grave and stared down. He could see the city as well as the castle off in the distance. Both were ruled by evil monsters but what was he. His father told him he was one of the knights tricked into selling his soul and like the gray knight or Thomas the silver knight he had the chance to earn his redemption, but only if he makes the right choice. In his time in this hell, he stood by some of the worst people imaginable, but it was hell after all and not filled with good choices. He said to his father’s grave, “If I can’t make a choice I can stand by then I won’t make a choice at all.” Roy turned away from both the city and the castle and headed for the vast unexplored forest.

Bill stepped out to get them something to eat. He had a refrigerator but no ability to cook in the room. Just as he made his way out and down the steps Tina was searching for the book. She passed by a set of comics that could have changed her views on the world and found the book at the bottom of a dresser. The book was still warm and with that strange feeling as
before, but now the fresh apple smell was gone replaced with a fermented hard cider scent. She stood up and opened the book stopping at a page showing a knight in gold armor. This knight was a woman, and she held a scimitar with gold fittings. Tina changed into the gold knight and saw her short sword was replaced with the larger sword. She drew the sword and held it out. It was heavier than she expected but the weight felt right. As she stood there staring at the sword, her armor changed from a mix of medieval and fantasy armor to something closer to a samurai. The gold took on a lacquered look while remaining metal.

Bill turned a corner and found two men dragging a woman into an alley. Halfway in one of the men struck the woman across the face knocking her out leaving a trail of blood as they left the sidewalk. Bill changed into the knight and followed them. One man was hunched on the ground near the woman’s purse with a small envelope of something in his hand. He was sniffing the contents. The other man was on top of the woman with his hands on her breasts. She had shallow cuts where he had cut her clothing away. The man with the envelope leaned back with powder on his face. He was the first one to see the knight. The man went for a gun in his waste. In his haste to pull the gun, it went off, and the man shot himself in the thigh. The other man pulled his pants up and went for a knife
in his boot. The knight struck the blade shattering the weak cheap steel and the man’s hand. The man with the gun rolled over aimed and fired, but the round bounced off the knight. The knight pulled a small dagger tossing it at the wounded man with the gun striking him in the throat. The blade pinned him to the ground, and in his struggle to get free he decapitated himself.

The knight walked over to the other man as he tried to get to his feet and make a run for the mouth of the alley. The knight swiped at the man’s ankle cutting his Achilles tendon sending him to the ground. The knight said, “you can’t escape fate.” The knight swung his sword cutting off the man’s belt taking the front of his pants with it. He said, “first I take your head than the head on top of your shoulders.” The knight lifted his sword and swung down. A glint of gold and the Scarlet knight’s sword was stopped by the gold knight. The Scarlet knight stepped back and said, “so back for more.” The gold knight replied, “you don’t have the right to take the law into your own hands. Even monsters deserve a fair trial. I would think someone that serves who you serve would understand that.” The Scarlet knight pointed at the woman and said, “I serve her not scum like this.” The Gold Knight pointed to the woman and asked, “then why aren’t you helping her instead of cutting this one into pieces?” Before he
could answer, the alley filled with blue and red lights. Both knights vanished into the night.
Chapter Thirteen

Tina perched on a nearby building and watched the police work the crime scene. They helped the victim into a car and drove her away. When she was gone another officer pulled out a baseball bat, then they took turns beating the survivor to death. When they were finished the final officer to take a swing took the bat and put it in his trunk. In the trunk was a bag filled with small envelopes of a white powder. Tina saw movement on the roof of a nearby building. A man in silver armor was watching the police. He turned from the alley looking over at her. Tina turned and ran to the other side of the roof and down the fire escape. She turned down another alley and made her way to the path along the river. A voice came from a dark place in the woods, “come and find me tonight in your dreams.” Tina turned to the sound only to see the shadow fade away. She made her way home where she found her parents in the living room watching the news. They acted like nothing was different even as Tina thought that everything had changed.

Darren turned to Vot and asked, “why couldn’t I go and do that? Why send this jagoff to cosplay as me?” Vot whispered to him, “eventually you as the silver knight can go back and forth between the worlds, but for now we need to send a proxy.” Darren
turned back to the screen and fumed over his inability to go where he wants when he wants. The Blue knight slowly slipped out of the room and out of the castle. The black knight watched the glass in quiet fascination. He had died long before the invention of the electric light seeing a world filled with colored lights and horseless vehicles was startling. When Hendrick took control of the city both he and Roy took a knee then they got out as fast as they could. Hector Rodríguez would never accept the rule of someone from Prussia. He was born to noble blood while Hendrick was nothing but a clerk and a murderer of women and children. While this man from someplace called Ohio was no better, he wasn’t someone Hector had cut down in battle. Hector pulled his sword and tapped the curved glass in the throne room. Vot asked, “just what are you doing?” Hector asked, “and they can’t see us?”

Bill laid down in his room and stared at the ceiling. He killed the man that killed Nadia but not the real culprit. This silver knight and his kingdom were a problem to the city. He knew that something needed to be done, but an all-out war just didn’t seem heroic. He also had more than a few questions about what he saw around the city. For a moment he thought he had seen a return of the Nazi imagery as well as those men in Gestapo uniforms. The king didn’t seem to know what
he was talking about and just because he was German, it didn’t mean he was a Nazi. Then there was the gold knight. She was the first woman knight he had seen here and while she was someone new she also seemed familiar. Thinking about her made him think about Tina and just how much he missed her. It was only a few hours, but those hours felt like a lifetime. The ceiling slowly changed until he was back in his apartment in the keep. From his window, he could see that the city had grown again, and the outer wall was no more. The new larger city was now bordered by a series of fences like the no man’s land between the two Koreas.

Tina stared at the city and the barren land between the two fences. It wasn’t clear if this was to keep people out or to keep them as prisoners. The city was imposing on the landscape like a metallic shard in the middle of a desert or a skyscraper in the middle of the woods. The silver knight said, “A sea of humanity in an ocean of wilderness.” Tina turned to face the knight who took off his helmet to show a face that wasn’t his. Like so many of the other male knights, Darren had a handsome face and not the one he left behind. He said, “we need to protect them from the evil forces sent out to destroy what is being built here.” Tina turned to the city then back to false Darren. She asked, “is any of this real?” Darren said, “it's as real as
you want it to be and more than it should be.” Tina wondered if she could trust him. She asked, “what can I do?” Darren fought the urge to say blow me and instead said, “help me save them all on both sides. We need to deal with the false Nazi king and his lackey the crimson knight.” Tina said, “scarlet knight.” Darren replied, “yeah, him too.”

Bill watched the silver and gold knight talk. He couldn’t see the face of the gold knight, and he didn’t recognize the face of the silver. He had that everyman face that so many of the knights had. The silver knight drew his sword, and the gold knight went to her knees. In a simple ceremony, the silver knight knighted the gold knight. He then put his hand on her shoulder leaving a silver mark as a notice that she was with him. Bill thought about just going to them and ending all this before they could start until a large group of people joined them including a black knight and a tan knight. Bill snuck away from this growing party and went back to the city where he found Hendrick walking around with his royal guard. They had a strange almost Gestapo feel to their uniforms. Bill was starting to wonder if he was on the right side when a group of children passed by playing a form of tag where the person that was “it” wore an armband. Had Bill been a better study of history he might have realized the armband had the star of David on it in
yellow. The same used to mark Jews in Nazi Germany before the Holocaust. Vot, however, saw it and knew its meaning. Shaking his head, Vot said to himself, “they just can’t seem to keep from ruining their own plans.”

Tina woke to find a note from her mother telling her that school was closed today, and she should watch the news. She turned on the television. A reporter was saying how a teacher had broken into the school and committed suicide in the lobby. A spokesman for the police said, “yeah, she took a razor blade and cut her fingertips leaving a message then she proceeded to cut every inch of her body until she fell to the floor and bled out.” The reporter returned and said, “the following image could be disturbing.” The image of the main lobby of the school appeared with a woman whom Tina didn’t know standing in frame. The news show burred out her nudity but not very well. The grainy green and black image then showed her taking something and wiping it on her body. As she did this, black streaks formed, welled and bled. The image of the reporter came back, and he said, “a thousand cuts for a thousand lies, God, please forgive your poor wayward child was painted in blood across the threshold of the school.” The show cut back to the officer who talked about this new drug. He said, “when we test the drug the reports all come back as
“vitamin B-12.” The reporter went on talking about this drug as well as the heroin epidemic. Tina smiled knowing this meant she could go see Bill.

Bill rolled over in his bed feeling like he hadn’t slept in weeks. When he closes his eyes, he’s back in the city when he wakes he’s in the motel room. Worst of all he knows something is wrong, but he also knows he is starting to not care. The last man he killed died badly with a knife in the throat. As he lay there the armor started to form, and an idea of finding trouble came across his mind, but then he remembered it was Monday and he had school. Bill got up and went into the bathroom to start a shower. He stepped in and let the hot water cascade down his back. The motel had impressive water pressure with water that was as clean and clear as he had ever tasted. The bathroom door opened, and Tina slipped into the shower behind him. Just for a second, she thought she saw a flash of red light, but then Bill turned around and smiled. Tina told him about the school and how the authorities were saying there might not be classes for at least a couple of days. Bill picked her up and pushed her against the shower wall as Tina wrapped her legs around him. Tina noticed how Bill seemed taller, but she thought that it didn’t make any sense. Tina whispered, “we have all day to our selves to do whatever we want.”
Daniel Danes was what most people would have called a nasty little boy. He would punch and kick anyone who would talk over him and by the age of ten he had physically assaulted five girls. Still, it was a surprise to almost everyone but his parents when he tried to break into the home of a classmate and assault her with a hammer. Before he made it to her room, he heard a click than a bang. He woke to find himself naked, in an open field surrounded by women. They had various tools in their hands from a hammer to a walking cane. The faceless women tackled him and beat him down with the tools with the woman holding the cane showing him the handle saying, “meet your new boyfriend.” Eventually, the pain went away, and he woke to find himself in the same field surrounded by the same woman and the same outcome. After some time passed, the situation changed, and he found himself in his classroom being dissected by his class. One day he opened his eyes and found he was in an unknown city with a man in blue armor.

William said, “you did a good job with the woman, but now I need you to ramp it up and try to get closer to her.” Daniel made a penetration gesture with his hands. William said, “oh if only I had the time. I need you to play the innocent little boy that told her
about the bad king and the evil scarlet knight. Do this, and I won’t touch you, and you can stay out of hell.” Daniel asked, “just how long was I in hell?” William picked up the boy and pushed him against the wall. He held the boys head still and kissed him on the lips, then he dropped the boy onto the pavement. William said, “just do as I say, and you won’t go back……., and you were there for about a month, but time means nothing in hell.” William became the blue knight and kicked Daniel in the gut. He then picked him up and tossed Daniel against the wall. Daniel started to fall forward when the blue knight smacked him across the face breaking his nose shattering a couple of teeth. The blue knight turned back into William. He said, “tell her the scarlet knight did this, and you don’t feel safe on the street anymore.” He then stepped down on Daniel’s left hand and ground his heel in until he felt the bones break. He whispered, “raping girls with a hammer? I like your style.”

Tina fell to Bill’s side in the bed saying, “I think I need another shower.” Bill rolled over and kissed her. He then rolled back and asked, “do you ever think about……. where……we are…….going?” Tina put her hand on his chest and felt Bill’s heart racing. At first, she was ready to make a joke, but when she realized he was serious, she said, “this whole thing between us has been so quick that I haven’t even
thought about anything but what we have right now.” She moved her hand to his face and lightly turn his head to her. She said, “to be fair, in my mind, we are already married and have five children.” Bill gave her a confused look. Tina went on saying, “in my mind, we married, and over the years we had five children. This was a long-running daydream I have had since maybe the third grade.” Bill looked down at his nudity than to her. He said, “it’s hard…… I mean difficult to think about someone having such dreams about someone like me.” It was Tina’s turn to give Bill a confused look. She asked, “someone like you?” Bill lost his content look and said, “some people are good at things like football while others are good at other stuff or are smart and handsome, but I just exist. I’m a random extra in the background of someone else’s story. Someone who is just there and has no part to play.”

Tina rolled back onto Bill pinning his arms down. She said, “that’s crap. This isn’t some idiotic tv show or movie, and you’re a large speaking role in our story.” She leaned in and kissed him again. As she did Bill grew aroused. He freed his arms and put his hands on her sides. Bill said, “I love you.” He then thrust up and into her. His thrust and feel shot a tingling feeling up Tina’s spine like an electric shock of pleasure. Tina said, “I had no idea that our story was going to be a porno.” She tightened her hips and locked her knees
into him as she joined in the movement until the two were in sync. She leaned in and whispered, “I love you.” When they finished, Tina said, “that was the best take yet.” Bill replied, “cut, print, and wrap.” A thought ran past his mind after thinking about Tina talking about children. Bill asked, “are we taking too many risks?” Not following him, Tina asked, “do you want a stunt double?” Bill replied, “no, I mean what we are doing. Making love without protection. I know you eventually want kids, but I don’t think you want them now.” Tina whispered, “my mom put me on the pill about two years ago to help with acne or that’s what she said anyway.” Bill replied, “maybe your mom doesn’t want to be a grandmother yet.”

From a dark corner of the room just out of their ability to see him, Vot watched them make love again. He didn’t like the act and didn’t like watching them like this, but he was playing a dangerous game, and he knew he had to watch over his prizes just in case someone made a play for them. Darren was a small-minded fool, and Hendrick would do anything to save his power. There was also another force working in the shadows against him and his plans. Vot said, “as if whomever this was could know my plans.” Vot faded into the wall and came out on the other side back in the city. In the courtyard to Tina’s house, Vot saw the boy named Daniel. He was bloody with obvious broken
bones and other injuries. Before he could go to him, Tina appeared and helped the boy into her house. He thought about how this felt like a setup but by whom. The boy was no angel, but no one other than Tina herself was angelic. After all, they populated this place with people from the many personal hells.

Tina helped Daniel into her house. She went over to a sink and started the water so it would get hot. She pulled a bottle of vodka out of a cupboard. Tina poured a glass to sterilize anything she would need to help him, but the boy took the glass with his unbroken hand and down the vodka on one go. His face turned red, and he stamped his foot on the floor saying in a gasp, "that’s not water.” In the corner of the room, Daniel saw the girl he was going to assault when he died. She was holding his hammer with a look of glee on her face. The corner melted away, and he saw the other faceless women with their prybars and canes. Daniel knew that hell was moving back in on him. The front door opened, and the little imp walked in with an old fashion medical bag and a name tag on his bright white shirt that read, “Dr. Vot.” Vot pulled out a bottle that read, “Vitameatavegamin.” Vot said, “this is the answer to all your problems.” He opened the bottle and poured some on the wounded hand. The bones snapped back into place and the cuts healed. Vot took the glass and poured about two inches of the liquid
from the bottle then three inches of vodka. Before he could say drink, Daniel took the glass and drank the mixture down. Daniel said, “it tastes like a liquid steak with broccoli and metal.”

Bill saw a man leave the city and head toward the castle. Something felt off about him, so Bill followed to see if he was going to the castle or not. There were a few small villages that popped up between the city and castle, and he could be on his way there, but something about this man said he wasn’t. Near one of the small unnamed villages, the man’s cloak turned from a dark greenish brown to a deep blue. He pulled the cloak back to reveal the blue armor. Something didn’t make sense. The blue knight was supposed to be this misshapen thing living in the wilderness. They passed through the village and out the other side. As he walked through the villagers went to their knees when they saw the knight. They stayed there until he passed. Bill followed him until he could see that the knight was indeed going to the castle. Bill struck quick knocking the blue knight down. William turned around and saw Bill. He put up his hands and said, “this isn’t what you think.” Bill plunged his sword into and through William. The blade stuck into the ground. William said, “nothing really matters.” His body turned to ash, and it blew away leaving the sword stuck in the dirt.
Daniel sat in the chair staring at where his hellish aberrations were. They were gone, replaced with nothing but empty space. Daniel looked at Tina and saw a heavenly glow around her. He didn’t understand this feeling, he felt warm and tingly around her. He wanted her he just didn’t understand why. Love or even like was a foreign concept to him. Most of his short life was filled with either hate and rage or nothingness. He felt nothing when he attacked those people. He neither loved them or hated them he just knew he had to do what he did at the time, but now he wondered if he was right. Tina turned and started to wipe the blood off his face. Daniel stared at her chest and for a second lost his breath when he could smell her. The smell of some sort of flower and an undercurrent of something that made him think of kissing her. Tina’s cloth found a place where the cut was still fresh, and the sting brought Daniel back from his daydream. For a second, he could see this wonderful woman in her bed, naked with him nearby holding his hammer.

Tina told Daniel he could stay in her house. Vot watched the boy as his smile grew into something almost demonic. Vot turned to Tina and said, “that might not be a good idea.” Daniel’s attitude turned
from happy to angry in the turn of the head. Tina didn’t see the turn. She said, “I want this to be a safe place for those that society deems unwanted.” Daniel smiled at Vot who was frowning back at him. Vot then smiled and said, “safe space yes we can make that happen.” Vot stood and walked over to Daniel. He said, “I can make this place neutral ground so that anyone committing any act of violence will be expelled.” Daniel lost his smile and glowered at Vot. Tina asked, “why can’t you just do that for the entire city?” Vot shook his head and replied, “it’s hard to explain without saying something I am not allowed to say, but I am here to protect you and no one else.” As he said this, he stared at Daniel.

Hendrick was in his bed as the latest potential new queen ground on him while moaning and gasping. He knew that most of this was an act. He wanted to replace the queen, but he started to understand he didn’t want another hump. Lotta was more than just a tight box to squeeze into she was a kindred spirit. A fellow member of the party that did her share to implement Hitler’s dream of a master race free of the Jews. Most of these women were either born long before his time or long after. The woman on top of him was little more than a teenager who thought a Nazi was just someone who didn’t vote for the democrat. As an American, she had no chance to become queen.
Hendrick tolerated Americans he just didn’t want to partner with one. He had a lot of balls in the air with the looming war with the other man calling himself king and his need to take the souls of both Tina and Bill to justify his kingdom. There was also a strange force working against him. He didn’t know how he knew he just knew.

Darren lay on his bed surrounded by various girls. Most of them were underage before they died. For Darren, sex was all about him and his satisfaction. The girls in his bed knew to keep their mouths shut and keep him happy. Two of their numbers said or did something Darren didn’t like so he tossed them to his court who had their way with them. One girl was tied to a post in the courtyard while the other’s head was on a pike at the entrance to the castle. Darren wasn’t consistent on what he liked leaving the girls to live in fear of upsetting him as well as the fear of going back to hell. Darren slipped out of bed and walked over to the door. One of the girls came over with a pair of shimmering silver silk pajama bottoms. She put them in front of Darren and waited for him to step into them. He stepped into the pajamas, and she slipped them up until he was covered. Two other girls came over with a matching robe. With the robe on the girls opened the door and Darren stepped out into the corridor. He walked to the throne room where his two advisors the
black and the tan knights were waiting for him as well as the pale face of the Deceiver.

Darren waved his hand, and the curved glass was brought into the chamber. The image went from a distorted view of the wall to that of Tina and Bill in bed asleep. Darren waved his hand, and the image changed to a split screen between his mother and father. Frank was on a beach in a pair of surfing trunks and a Hawaiian shirt. He was drinking some sort of fruity drink with an umbrella and several pieces of fruit chunks floating in the glass. On the other side of the screen, Nancy was face down in the lap of her brother-in-law George going down on him. They were in a very nice-looking hotel room with a view of what looked like the New York skyline. Darren waved his hand again, and the image turned to the Monday night football game. Vot watched all this from the corner of the room. Darren saw a teenage girl in the corner of the room next to what must have been her father. He smiled, and she smiled back. She then showed him a little of her leg. Darren straightened out to show his bulge in the pajama bottoms. She ran her hands across the top of her dress. Darren said to the Deceiver, “it’s good to be the king.”
Tina woke to find a note next to her on the bed, “gone to get some food, I’ll be back.” She rolled out of bed and walked to the window. The sky was darkening with signs of rain and a darker feeling of something ominous on the horizon. Winter was on its way, and it would only be a matter of time before the first real snow. As a child, Tina loved the snow, but now she just saw the problems the snow brings. She was having a hard time seeing a future for her and Bill. He was set up to fail from the beginning with parents that couldn’t care less while she had her whole life planned out for her by her parents. Bill was working on a high to perfect grade point average, but she couldn’t see him finishing school. Eventually, he will need to find a job to support himself. After their talk, Tina thought about the pill. She turned to take the next one in the cassette, only to realize she missed more than a few of the pills. She counted the pills in the package and realized that about the time they started to have sex was when she went off the pill. She put the package in her bag just as Bill came back into the room. Tina could smell the hamburgers before she could see the Hardie’s bag. Bill saw her standing there naked at the window. A ray of light came through the clouds illuminating the room adding a golden aura to Tina. When the light hit Bill, he seemed to glow a scarlet red.
Bill joined her in her nudity, and together they ate, drank and made love. Tina knew or thought she knew that she couldn’t just start back up with the pill. She would need to see a doctor, and most of all take a pregnancy test. She wanted to tell Bill about the pills, but she also didn’t want to worry him. Eventually, she decided to not tell him, and on her way home that day she would stop by the clinic where she got the pills and do what she had to, so she could start back up with the birth control and what Bill doesn’t know won’t hurt him. Tina noticed how everything tasted better than they had in her lifetime. The fries were fresher, and the hamburger was the best she had ever had. Even the diet soda seemed to be better. She finished her burger and saw her hands had some of the greases from the meal on them. She got on her knees and wiped the grease on Bill between his legs. He asked, “what are you doing?” Tina just gave him a smile and started to go down on him. Even this seemed better than before.

Frank sat on a beach on the Pacific side of Mexico. The sun was setting in the west giving him a view that was spectacular. His bakery was sitting idle and would never reopen with him as the operator. He had enough money to do whatever he wanted for the rest of his life but what he doesn’t have is Nancy. He told her about the money only for her to tell him about his own brother and how she was leaving him for
George. The money was from his drug business and Frank putting one, and one together could see how his son’s absence was causing the uprise in drug violence. He thought about Bill alone in that house. Part of him wanted to send Bill some money while another part wanted him to go and bring his son to Mexico. He also wanted to kill his brother. Eventually, he knew he couldn’t go back just in case the authorities could link the money to the drugs. He also knew he could eventually set his thoughts about this boy that might not be his son aside and live his life in Mexico away from all the crap he made for himself and his family. As he sat there watching the sun two men watched him.

Back home in her bed, Tina closed her eyes and woke in a field near a castle in the gold armor. The castle had silver banners with a dark silver flame emblem. She walked over to the castle feeling many eyes on her. At the entrance, the gate opened, and she walked in to find a lively court filled with people moving about doing their daily activities like nothing was out of the ordinary. A horn blew, and two knights stepped out. One was in a black armor while the other was in a tannish armor. Everyone went to their knees. The silver knight walked out wearing a gold crown and a silver fur cape. He seemed like a different man than before even though he had the same face. The silver
knight walked over to Tina and said, “*all hail the gold knight.*” The crowd repeated the same, then they repeated it again. Tina said, “*I don’t know about any of this, but if it can help me take care of this problem then I am willing to do whatever it takes.*” Using his false face, Darren said, “*your problem is our problem, and that is the Nazi in the city and the evil Scarlet Knight. He has already killed at least eight people back in the real world and will kill more unless we stop him.*” Vot watched all this from on top of a wall thinking how his plan was working well.

Near the ruins of the original court held by Adam and Eve, a blue light formed then it took shape in the dirt until the dirt turned to a blue metal and the blue knight. William took off his helmet and took in a breath. He felt for where the sword struck him, but the wound was gone. He sat up and stared at the ruins of the throne where this kingdom was formed. Nearby were the ruins of the ancient Roman and Greek civilizations that once where the heart of this hell kingdom, but this simple stone circle was where it all started. This is where Cain ruled the land for many years before he just disappeared. Near him was the place where Lucifer opened a rift in reality and tossed Adam and Eve into the void. For a moment he wasn’t sure if he would come back. He could see the hell that was waiting for him. His plan was in motion to either
remove the two kings or help him set up his kingdom in one of the old cities. Either one would work because of their distance to the city and castle and how they were made to support a larger community. He could see raiding hell for as many people he could find to serve him. But right now, he had a long walk back to the castle where his absence will be noticed.

The Scarlet Knight followed two officers as they walked down into the park. Something felt off about how they were walking. Near the river, they came up to a man sitting on a bench. One of the officers opened an envelope and took a little powder out. He put his hand up to his nose and inhaled the powder. Bill couldn’t hear what was being said. One of the officers grabbed the man and tossed him to the ground. The other kicked him when he tried to get back up. The first officer kneeled on the back of the man’s legs and pulled the man’s head bending him back. The second officer struck the man across the throat then he searched him finding some cash and a handful of small envelopes. The officer opened one of the envelopes and stuck his finger inside taking out a small amount of white powder and sticking it in his mouth. The effect was immediate. The officer pulled a knife and ran it across the man’s throat. Blood shot across the path. Without warning, he then pulled his sidearm and shot his partner in the head.
The officer fell to his left as the man grabbed for his neck and the gushing wound. The Scarlet Knight dropped behind the officer and came into view. The officer spun around and fired at the knight striking him but doing no damage. The man on the ground with his throat slit let go as the bleeding stopped. The officer’s gun locked back out of rounds. Instead of reloading, he threw the gun at the knight. He pulled his baton and came after the knight. Off in the distance, the knight could hear people moving in on their location. He thought that only first responders like the police would move in on gunfire. The knight stepped back and vanished before the eyes of the officer just before the other police arrived. The officer turned around to face the others. He was covered in blood and a white powder. The knight drew his sword and swiped at the officer cutting his head off, but all the other officers saw was the head and the body drop. The gold knight followed the new officers to the scene, and she saw the Scarlet Knight kill the officer.

The scarlet knight took off and flew across the river to the other side. The Gold Knight followed on foot. She saw the knight watching the police, and she struck coming from above using a street light to mask her attack. The blade struck his shoulder sending out a
ringing sound and a smack. The Scarlet Knight dropped to his right knee. He dropped and rolled away from the strike while pulling his own sword. He could feel something dripping down his arm. The Gold Knight went to her left and moved in with her blade down to block his while striking upward. The Scarlet Knight went to his left forcing the Gold to follow him as they circled each other connecting blade to blade in an even match that could see no outcome until someone made a mistake. The Gold Knight said, “cop killer.” The Scarlet Knight responded, “you have no idea what you are talking about.” She said, “I know enough.” She shifted her stance and caught the Scarlet Knight in his side forcing him to drop his sword. The blade faded into the ground. Vot jumped stopping time and pulled Bill out of the armor and away from the fight. Time started again as the scarlet armor fell at her feet then vanished.
Chapter Fourteen

The room spun around as Bill came in and out from the blood loss and injuries. The multiple images came together, and he found himself in a room that seemed familiar. He checked, and the wounds were gone. There was this thick, sticky substance on his shoulder and side that smelled like cooked meat, broccoli, and metal. He realized he was in his mother’s bed back in the house he was kicked out of a few days ago. Bill tried to get up from the bed only to find every bone and muscle in his body hurt. He could remember the fight and how the Gold Knight struck him in the gut, and his shoulder felt like it was broken, but now he was just sore. The Gold Knight caught him off guard, and she thought he was the bad guy. She went from platitudes to a sneak attack and a killing strike. A door opened and Vot walked in wearing an old-style nurse’s uniform with the matching hat pinned into a large beehive. Bill said, “there was this show on tv called M.A.S.H. with a man who dressed like a woman trying to get kicked out of the army and away from the war.” Vot curtsied then he said, “Ok you can call me Klinger.”

Vot’s image shifted from the nurse to his usual white suit. He turned to Bill with a smile that was as fake as the wig he was just in. He said to Bill, “the
Gold Knight is a complication that will need to be addressed, but we can’t let her get in the way of the mission.” Bill got to his feet and stood as tall as he could manage. He asked, “mission?” Vot walked over to Bill who sat so he could talk to Vot without looking down. Vot said, “your brother started something that is going to destroy this community. This new drug he sold is changing people into violent psychopaths. You saw this with the police last night. It will only get worse, and there is nothing they can do, but you can.” Bill took in a breath and asked, “what can I do that the police can’t?” Vot smiled seeing he had his fish on the line. He said, “the one supplying the drug is the Silver Knight. He is also your brother Darren.” Bill slid back into the bed. He said, “no, Darren’s dead. It can’t be him.” Vot replied, “my boy there is so much more to the universe than the two simple states of alive and dead. Your brother is the Silver Knight and the king of the castle. He is also driving the Gold Knight at you.”

Vot waved his hands, and the room turned black. When the lights came back, they were in the woods near the castle. Vot said, “you aren’t really here this is just a projection of that other side.” Together the two walked into the castle and past the Blue and Black Knights. Vot pointed to the Blue Knight and said, “this one is a conniving pedophile child murderer.” He pointed to the Black Knight and said,
“and he raped a girl to death while bleeding his community dry to obtain power.” In the throne on one side of the room was Darren in a silver and gold robe over matching pajamas. He had on a gold crown. A young boy was standing on a chair that was balanced on one leg while the boy juggled six balls. Darren said, “whatever” and tossed a knife at the boy hitting him in the chest knocking him off the chair. A young girl that looked a lot like Tina came in wearing a see-through robe. She came over to Darren and started to give him a lap dance in front of everyone in the court. Darren spun her around while pulling the robe off her. He pulled her into his lap then he opened his pajama bottoms freeing himself from them and penetrating the girl. He turned to another knight in a tannish armor and said, “let anyone who wants to have a turn.”

The image went flat like the whole tableau became an oil painting then the image became his parent’s bedroom wall again. Vot said, ‘there are only a few men that can take the drug from the kingdom to this side. Those six men need to die to save your community.” Bill asked, “what about my brother and the Gold Knight?” Vot smiled again and said, “when you succeed your brother will fall. His kingdom is based on his ability to send this drug over to the other side, and without it, he becomes just another knight and one that’s not very liked. As for the Gold Knight
don’t worry about her. She will see the errors of her way and join you.” Bill put his hand on his shoulder and said, “this didn’t feel like something a reasonable person would do.” Vot lost his smile and said, “you would be surprised at what rationality can make a reasonable person do. If you can find the right words, you can lead a person to do almost anything."

Vot thought about those early days when all was new as well as his first acts leading people astray. He sat underneath a tree and watched the two boys play. It had been more than a few years since he and the other forces of temptation tricked their parents into breaking the one rule and getting kicked out of paradise. The boys never knew what Eden was like in person. Their parents talked about it, but there is a difference between hearing and seeing. Part of his job was to see to their needs and that included interactions between them and the other humans. Both Adam and Eve were made to be the perfect humans, and that realization made them unbearable for the others. Because God didn’t want them to live with the other humans and influence natural selection the two were placed in their own world away from the rest. This world away from the other was populated by people as close to Adam and Eve as possible. With the new people, they built a small community and like so many will do in the future they had children. In those early
years, both Adam and Eve prayed and prayed to be allowed back into Eden. When Cain was born, they both decided to build their own Eden where they were. A year later they had Able.

Vot turned around and saw the teenage Cain talking with a girl while Able spent his days at an alter sacrificing animals and offering food to God to demonstrate his willingness to do whatever he had to do so his family could go back to Eden. This was about the time Vot lost interest in Able and turned all his attention to Cain. He watched as Able became the favorite of his parents because of his mission to get them back into Eden. Cain was the only one trying to make a life where they were while Able led their parents away from their reality. Vot knew that Cain would do anything to keep what he had and Able would keep him from building that life. Vot started a fight between the boys that eventually led to Cain killing Able. Just as Cain swung the rock, Vot was pulled away to a dark forest. A little time later and the family arrived. This new land would be their home from then on. For the death of Able, they would live forever away from the humanity they could have ruled.

Those first days Adam and Eve stayed huddled in the forest away from Cain who stayed by the lake
thinking about the girl he lost as well as his brother. He didn’t seem to understand that what he did was forever. Vot went out and found them some food, but then he was told to never do that again. They would have to take care of themselves. Adam took the food and split it between himself and Eve. Three days into their exile, Adam struck Cain in the head with a rock to kill him. He fell to the ground and turned to ash. Nearby his body reformed from the ground. Vot was called away to meet with the other temptations and form what would be that first tablet and finally the book. The tablet would be used to populate this new hell giving Adam and Eve a way to redeem themselves showing compassion something they would never figure out. Cain as the one who committed the first murder was condemned to this realm forever.

Many years later, the land was shaking as the book failed to get the soul of the young girl Kaylee. The world was going to split apart, and everyone was on their way into the void. A rift opened and Vot saw a flash of light on the other side. He went and found Cain sitting on a rock waiting for the end. Vot told him he could help him, but Cain was ready to fall. A voice came from the void saying, “please come.” It had been many years, but Cain knew that voice, and together they went into the void as Hendrick took the throne. They found themselves on the other side of the
mountains near a village. Cain met with a woman he knew from all those years ago living just out of his reach and together they made a new life. Vot didn’t know what he was supposed to do. He expected to fade away when the book failed but somehow, he was still around, so he went back to see why.

Vot helped Bill get dressed and then left him to deal with his task. Bill noticed that something was different about the little man. He almost seemed sad. Bill made his way back to the motel just in time to get ready for school. On the way to school, he noticed that there was no one on the roads. The town seemed deserted. That was until he got to the school. The usual line of buses was down to three, and they were all on fire. The principal came out of the front doors of the school with a shotgun. He pointed it at Bill and said, “sorry son but no tardiness.” He fired hitting Bill in the armored chest as he became the Scarlet Knight. The principal loaded a shell and said, “that just will not due.” He then put the shotgun to his throat and blew his head off. The knight walked into the building finding bottles of water everywhere. He turned back to Bill and opened a bottle dumping a little into his hand. The immediate feeling from the drug came over him. The water made him feel good like he could take on the world.
Tina knocked the bottle out of his hand. She said, “we’ve got to get out of this place.” Bill smiled and replied, “if it’s the last thing we ever do.” She could see the drug was slowly taking over Bill’s mind. Not knowing what to do she kissed him. Bill woke to find he and Tina were in a war zone between the teachers and the students. Two teachers were kicking a student who was lying on the floor while three students where using yardsticks to beat an elderly teacher as he begged for his life. The lights flickered as chaos overwhelmed the halls. Tina said, “someone gave the school this water, and this morning they gave everyone a bottle.” Bill said, “I overslept.” Just outside of the school they could hear the first of the sirens and the sounds of both the police and fire department. Bill asked, “so do you think there will be school tomorrow?” Tina saw a bottle with a flame on it pass land near a fire truck and spread fire like a bomb. Then another one hit. Gunfire erupted outside as both Tina and Bill went to the floor. About five minutes of uninterrupted gunfire then silence. A body fell out of a window onto the stairs near the fallen headless body of the principal. A few minutes later and the police came in wearing body armor. They zip tied anyone left alive including both Bill and Tina. Outside they could see the full extent of the assault from the bomb damage to the gunfire. The school was almost a bombed-out shell.
Bill was taken into a room in the police station and cuffed to a table. On his way in he saw several bottles of the water. The station had a strange smell and a vibe that made the place feel less than official. He could hear sounds from the room next to him. At first, it sounded like an officer was asking questions about the school then the tone turned odd. Muffled Voice, “how do I know you don’t have a weapon on you........ that bulge doesn’t look safe.” A zipping sound then sounds of smacking. The Muffled Female voice, “I had no idea a fifteen-year-old could be so big....... Oh, fuck me hard you bad, bad little boy.” Then a door opened and muffled sounds of a scuffle followed by a gunshot and the sounds of two bodies hitting the ground. Three more shots followed by someone saying, “now do me.” Another gunshot then a click, click, click. Bill’s door opened, and a man came in closing the door and locking it. He turns and sees Bill pointing his gun at him.

The man pointed his gun at Bill and said, “leave now.” Bill lifted his hands showing he was cuffed to the table. The man saw the water bottle and went for it. Bill said, “hey I think there’s something in the water.” The man squeezed the bottle then he tossed it in the trash. He said, “I needed to know if it was
open.” He pointed the gun back at Bill and asked, “who are you?” Bill put his hands back up and said, “my name is Bill……that is William Martin, and I’m a sophomore.” The man lowered the gun and said, “OK, Bill the sophomore. My name is David Foster, and I’m a deputy with the Summit County sheriff’s department. I was on my way to court then a call came in about the school and the station.” Hoping to sound like he didn’t already know, Bill asked, “what the hell is going on out there?” David pocketed the gun and pulled out a set of keys. He unlocked the cuffs and said, “I’ve got no fucking idea. I was on my way to a custody hearing. I wasn’t even supposed to work today.” The pocket David put the gun in was smudged with a darkish red and thinking back on it he remembered how the stainless-steel gun was also stained with blotches of red.

Bill and David left the room. As they did, they passed the room next to them, and Bill could see the aftermath of the muffled sounds including the body of a wayward friend. Jim Hass was once his best friend before he devoted his life to the football team. Their last encounter was painful and left them with nothing to say to each other. Jim was on the ground, naked with the body of an older woman off to one side. Next to them was a uniformed officer. From what they could tell the officer shot the woman in the head and the
round passed through her and into Jim killing them both as they had sex. Oddly Jim had a smile on his face even though he would have seen the gunman. David said, “there’s nothing we can do for them, but there’s plenty we can do for ourselves.” Bill did something he would later realize was most likely illegal. He pulled down the state flag of Ohio and covered the lower half of his friend’s body. David pulled a gun off the fallen officer and tried to give it to Bill who just put up his hand and said, “I have my own.” Bill became The Scarlet Knight. David backed up and said, “holy shit.”

As the knight, Bill was taller than David. Bill put out his arm then he brought it back to his body. As he did this a shield formed. The Knight handed it to David and said, “follow me, and I’ll get you out of here.” David just nodded and followed the knight with the shield blocking as much as he could. They passed a few rooms with bodies on the floor then a large open room filled with cubicles. An occasional round bounced off the knight and the shield. At the door, they saw what had to be the national guard in some sort of combat hazmat suits, but even in the suits David and the knight could see the look of amazement on their faces as they saw the knight. One of the soldiers ordered them to the ground. The knight let David walk over to the guard as he became invisible. As he vanished, the shield went with him. The soldiers pulled
David out of the building as gunfire erupted behind them from the cubicles. A voice came out from one of the cubicles that sounded familiar. The one that killed Jim was among those still fighting. The knight followed the voice until he found the man. The man had a shotgun on his back and one in his arms with three holsters around his waist with a gun in each holster. He also had a simple tag on his overalls that just read, “Janitor.”

Bill thought about the boy Jim was and how much his friendship had meant to him. How he would never have the chance to forgive his friend and just maybe make amends for everything that happened. The knight’s vision turned a scarlet red, and he pulled his sword. The blade changed in his hand with the leading edge going dull. The janitor stopped firing at the door just in time to see the knight become visible and the dull blade come down on him. The sword didn’t cut as much as it crushed. The knight could feel bones break and rupture. He swung beating the man to death rather than cutting him down. Vot watched the attack and made a mental mark in his head counting the death towards Bill’s body count. The broken, bloody ruin of a man said, “hit me, baby, one more time.” The knight dropped the sword and backed away. He remained the knight until he got back to his motel room when he changed back. The news was talking
about a series of gas leaks that destroyed the high school and a police station. Alone in his room, Bill thought about the look on the principal’s face as well as the janitor asking him to finish the job and hit him one more time.

A few hours earlier, Tina was in her first class of the day. The day started off odd with a sense of dread in the halls and a feeling of big brother watching. Walking into the class, she saw a pallet filled with wrapped water bottles. She took her seat as Ms. Guy came into the room. She was in her mid-fifties and always had a just came back from a hippie commune look to her as well as the faint hint of marijuana. This morning she was holding an open bottle of water in one hand with a lit joint in the other. She tossed her bottle of water to a boy in the front row. Some of the water was on the bottle, and as it hit his hand, Tina could see a change in his demeanor. Ms. Guy had him pass out the bottles, and when he was done, she said, “drink then do whatever you want.” She waived the boy back to her and handed him the joint. He took a hit off the joint and held the smoke in. Tina watched as her classmates opened the water and drank, changing from fear to a sort of disconnect to what was happening. Tina turned back to the front of the room where the teacher was now kissing the boy as she opened his pants and pulled them down.
time Ms. Guy went to her knees in front of the boy, Tina knew she had to get out of the school. Using a napkin, she had in her bag, Tina carefully put the water bottle into her bag. She heard a gunshot outside. In the hall, she found Bill with a “just had a bottle of water” look on his face.

Tina sat on the floor next to her parents in their living room watching the news as they pull burnt bodies out of the school. When she left the school, it wasn’t on fire. The news was playing the story as a tragic accident with no overtones of what really happened. Tina looked at the phone then back to the television. Her mother took hold of the top of Tina’s head and lightly turned it to face her. She said, “it’s ok to worry and yes go call him.” Tina faked a “who do you mean” look, but her mother just said, “don’t play me the fool Tina I know all your friends and where you have been going at night, and I already know Bill.” Tina’s father growled a little. Tina looked back to the phone then back to the television then back to the phone. Before she could ask her mother said, “absolutely not. You are here for the night, and that is just that. I’m sure his parents feel the same way.” Tina closed her eyes and said, “Bill’s parents both left town a few days ago and……. They kicked him out of the house. His mother rented him a room at that motel near route Eight, but his mother basically disowned
him saying she never wanted to have him.” Her father said, “I never liked either one of them. What kind of people do something like that.”

Bill’s phone rang, but he was not home. After seeing the lie on the news, he went back to the police station to see if he could find that deputy he helped to make sure he was alright. About a block away from the station he saw David directing traffic while ordering people away from the scene. The temperature had dropped, and there was a hint of snow in the air. David had on a flat hat worn by the highway patrol with the plastic cover and a yellow overcoat with police on the back. The look was an interesting mix of departments with the sheriff’s department uniform collar showing. David saw Bill on a nearby rooftop and nodded but didn’t do anything else to acknowledge his presence. A curfew was in place, and it was clear Bill was breaking the curfew, but David also believed the city was safer with him there watching over rather than hiding wherever he lived. Off in the distance, there was an explosion. David looked back to Bill, but he was gone.

Bill ran across the roof and onto another roof until he could see what was happening. Two cars went head-on with one of the drivers lying across the hood of his car. His head was at an angle that the body was
never meant to turn. The other car was a station wagon of some kind with a woman behind the wheel. She was unresponsive with blood on her face and hands from the airbag deploying. In the back were three children ranging in ages from nine to two. The oldest two were crying while the two-year-old watched Bill as he jumped from the roof changing into the knight and walked over to the car. Bill could smell smoke, and as he approached the car, he could see flames. Bill went to the cars and pulled them apart, but the wagon had a broken axle and wouldn’t move freely. Bill thought about a hydrant nearby then he remembered that you don’t use water on a gas fire because the water will just spread the gas without extinguishing the flames. Bill picked up the wagon and flew it down the block. Bill came back and turned the other car over, so he could rip out the gas tank and take it away from the flames. He flipped it over just in time to see the explosive charge go off.

The world erupted in flames as something hard hit Bill’s back. Bill saw he was tossed back into a nearby building. The explosion made a crater in the street, but it also put the fire mostly out. Windows were broken, and more than a few not so silent alarms were going off. Bill took off and hoped that someone would help that family in the car. His back hurt but the armor was just a scarlet red as before. Darren watched
all this from his castle. He ordered everyone out of the throne room when the fight at the school started. Darren scowled at Vot asking, “*who the fuck ordered that because I know it wasn’t me.*” Vot smiled trying not to let Darren know that he had no idea who was responsible for the water or the school, but it was working in their favor. Darren shook his head saying, “*that was my school. I still have friends there as well as more than a few teachers that I liked. I might be bad, but that’s just monstrous.*” Vot looked over at where the blue knight should be. He was absent from many of the meetings, and he was also the kind of guy that would do such a thing but how would he be able to travel back and forth?” In the ruins of one of the old cities, there was a portal that could go back and forth, but none of them should know about that. Vot said, “*let me worry about that.*”

Bill stepped out of his shower and got dressed in a pair of sweatpants and a matching sweatshirt. The message light on the phone was blinking so he checked it hearing nine messages from Tina wanting to know he was alright. He checked the cheap pay-as-you-go phone only to find it was broken. The time was around one am, but the last call was about ten minutes ago when he was in the shower. Bill called back, and Tina answered, “Bill?” Bill sat down and said, “*yeah, I just got out of the shower after spending a little time with*
the police....... sorry I couldn’t call.......oh yeah I somehow broke the crap phone.” More than a moment of silence went by then Tina said, “thank god you weren’t in that station when it went up.” Bill almost said he was, but he didn’t want Tina to know about the knight just yet. He said, “do you believe that lies the news stations are telling. I mean what a load of crap.” Tina replied, “who would believe the truth. I mean I know the truth, and I still don’t know what to believe.” Bill said, “the only truth that matters is that I love you.” Tina replied, “yes I know, and I you.” Bill looked at the time then he asked, “your parents are there with you, right?”

The next morning after a night of watching the castle, Bill watched the news to see when school was going to start back up after the event. The news was calling that night the event. The first hour was the usual talk about the fire then someone was interviewed about a head-on accident. She said how she tried to turn, but the other driver met her turn, and they connected. The youngest of her children said, “Sir Red saved us.” The mother leaned in and whispered something when a reporter asked, “who?” The mother mentioned a video her son watched as she put it, “all the time” about a group of knights in colored armor and one of the knights was named Sir Red, but he was the bad guy. The little boy looked angry when the
news turned back to the news anchor who went on about the fire. The news went to a commercial and came back with a video from outside a strip mall near Chapel Hill Mall. She was talking about how the school system just rented most of the shops and would reopen next week. She also said how the state would allow students to move to charter schools or private schools. A knock at the door and Bill found Tina on the other side in a long winter coat. Bill opened the door and said, “I guess we have today off.” Tina opened her coat to show she had nothing but a bra and panties on. She said, “speaking of things being off.”

Inside Bill took off his sweatshirt and started to take off the sweatpants when Tina said, “stop there’s something I need to tell you.” Bill stopped and sat down. Tina looked to her left then back to Bill. She thought about how she could tell him about her parents knowing about them and what his parents did, but she had nothing. Bill asked, “what?” Tina unhooked her bra and let it fall to the ground. She said, “I guess it doesn’t matter.” She put her hands up in the air and said, “I think someone should finish what I started.” Bill went to his knees and pulled her panties down. Bill looked up at her then he started to go down on her. As he did Tina could see a large bruise on his back. She pushed into him a little and using her head pointed to the bed. Bill pulled off his sweatpants and together
they fell into the bed rolling around until Tina was on top. They stopped rolling as Tina slowly slid down onto him and started to move up and down. She whispered into his ear, ‘my parents know about us, about this and about your parents.’

The Blue Knight walked away from the castle and into the woods. Vot followed him as William left the path and headed to one of the old cities. Vot knew where he was going and what was there, but he couldn’t figure out what William wanted. The last person to act against the will of the book was tossed into the void. Putting Bill against Tina could prevent either of them from finishing their tasks and losing their souls. Bill was six deaths away while Tina was nowhere near her goal. The loss of both souls would send William into the void, end Hendrick’s kingdom and just maybe close the book forever. It would also hurt Vot’s plan. William stopped near the crest of a hill and turned around to see if anyone was there, but Vot is only seen when he wants to be seen. William turned back and went off toward the ancient unnamed Roman city. Knowing his destination, Vot circled around so he could make his way to a part of the city where he can see the main court and the portal. The city was lit with torches and what Vot saw was something he didn’t expect.
Hendrick glared at the curved glass wondering why he can’t see what William was up to or much of anything on the other side. He could feel his control slipping away. The city was still growing, but his court seemed to be slowing down. Vot basically told him that another failure could bring about the end of the kingdom with everyone falling into the void. He sat there and thought about all the people he killed in the name of a man long dead. A man that killed himself rather than facing the Russians. He tried to get some of his old colleagues from the Reich, but he could never find the right plain of hell and some of them including Hitler himself were locked away from any ability to pull him out. Hendrick turned to the latest woman trying to become queen and said, “It’s hard to be the king.” He walked over to the window and stared out. He said, “when I became king I thought I would be free from worry and aggravation but now all I do is wait and wait knowing my kingdom is out of my hands.” The woman got out of his bed and walked over to him by the window. She said, “maybe it’s time you reminded people that you are not just the king but the orange knight.”

A group of people went around in a circle around a statue of two people made of a mix of marble
and gold. The people were in a mix of Roman togas and tie-dyed sundresses, but most of them were naked. Flowers were tossed at the feet of the statue as well as the sporadic crashes of wine casks. All around the periphery, the people were in some state of debauchery. Vot found William in a corner. He was no longer in the armor or any other kind of clothing. He was making out with a woman as other around them drank and copulated. Vot thought about how the two for whom the statue was made to resemble would love all this and just maybe joined in the orgy. Vot recognized more than a few of the people as those that populated the city back in the day. When is mission changed he stopped watching these people even though he knows the location of everyone who was ever put in his charge even the location of those in the void. Vot stared at the city filled with people and saw just how he could save his plan and renew his reason for existence. Vot walked over to the portal as the orgy came to a sudden stop. The portal was a stone well filled with swirling water that emitted various colors of light. He stared into the portal until he saw what or who he wanted and dipped his hand in the water. He formed a ball of water and tossed it into the air where it formed a thin plate of water emitting a white light that filled the open courtyard.
Off in the distance, there was a bright white beam of light. Both Bill and Tina saw the beam. Bill was in his apartment while Tina was just outside the wall. In seventy-two years, Hendrick had never seen something like this. Bill turned to the Scarlet Knight and went to see what the light was. As he passed overhead, Tina turned to the Gold Knight and followed him. The Gold Knight couldn’t fly, but she could run. A mile away from the city, Bill saw a glint of gold on the ground. The Scarlet Knight dropped in the path of the Gold Knight and waited for her. Tina saw him land and knew he was waiting, so she sped up. She formed a spear, and as the Scarlet Knight came into view, she threw the spear at him. The Scarlet Knight formed his shield to block the spear, but the spear pierced the shield nearly hitting him in the shoulder. The Scarlet Knight dropped the shield and formed his sword as the Gold Knight came down with her sword. He stepped to the right and struck her across the chest, but the blade was still blunted from the assault the night before. The blow sent her bent over into the trees about ten feet away.

Tina felt the armor melt away, and she knew the Scarlet Knight would win. She shut her eyes and waited for the end. When she opened them, she was back in bed with Bill in the motel room. The Scarlet Knight searched the woods looking for the Gold
Knight. The light was gone, and he had no idea which direction it was or what it was about. Off in the distance, he could hear a voice, “Bill……Bill……Bill.” The Knight became Bill again who looked around trying to find the voice. The voice asked, “Bill are you asleep?” Bill closed his eyes and opened them to find Tina leaning over him asking if he was asleep. He kissed her then he rolled her over running his hand down her body stopping as she winced at his touch just below her breasts. Bill asked, “are you alright? What’s wrong, I mean what happened?” Tina couldn’t think of a way to tell Bill what was happening with her and this other life, so she said, “I tripped and planted into a rail on some steps.” Bill thought about the school steps and the handrails. As he stared at the bruise, Tina took hold of him and said, “I have to get home soon, so you can either stare at my chest, or we can have some real fun.” She could feel him grow aroused in her hand. Her mind went back to the pills she missed and how she wasn’t on the pill until she could see someone, so she could take them safely. Bill kissed her and leaned in when Tina said, “maybe we should start to use a little more protection, just in case.”

As the light faded the people around the courtyard moved closer with William pushing people aside. He came up behind Vot who put up his hand in a stop motion. The light faded and in what was the
center of the light were two figures. A man and a woman, both naked and clinging to each other. Vot said, “it surprises me to see they found each other in the big nothing. That wasn’t supposed to be possible.” The woman raised her head and opened her eyes seeing Vot. She went to speak then stopped. She tried again and squeaked out, “Peirasmós.” Vot slightly turned his head saying, “one of the many names I was known by.” The two separated then they came close together. Vot said, “at first they will be speaking a language you will not have the ability to understand, but eventually they will adjust.” William stared at the two and asked, “is that...... I mean can that be?” Vot turned to William and asked, “wasn’t this your plan. I mean all this wasn’t so you can convince me to bring them back?” William said, “I didn’t think it was possible. This was to bring Cain out of hiding and stabilize the land so we could take out the Nazi.” Vot smiled and said, “yes and make yourself king.”

Hendrick stepped out onto a terrace overlooking a courtyard next to the keep. Before him was an army dressed in white and orange with swords and rifles. Hendrick became the orange knight wearing a white crown and a white cape with orange trim. On his sleeve as well as on the arms of all the men was the swastika. The soldiers put up their right arms in salute yelling, “hail king, hail king.” Vanessa stood behind
him in the doorway in a gold tiara with orange gems and a white gown with iridescent white and orange beads. Hendrick walked up to a podium with a microphone and said, “*today we show those people that the days of knights are over.*” Hendrick let his armor vanish showing an orange uniform with white trim. He said, “*today we take the war to the unworthy and build a true civilization that will last a thousand years.*” A chant started, “*power, power.*” Hendrick continued, “*the mighty will take the land from the unworthy cleansing to make a pure nation.*” The chanting became louder until the sound vibrated the walls of the keep. Hendrick put up his hands, and the crowd went silent. He said, “*it’s time to go to war.*”

Darren watched as The Scarlet Knight was thrown back against a building. The image shifted, and he watched it again. He spent the night watching the video never getting tired of seeing just how close they came to killing Bill. His dealers were trying to take care of Bill on their own and even though Bill won they still provided him with entertainment. The Black Knight ran into the throne room and went to his knee. Darren didn’t want to be interrupted so at. First, he didn’t acknowledge his presence. The girl wearing a skirt from a cheerleader’s uniform darted her eyes over to the Black Knight, but she knew better than to stop going down on him. Darren grabbed her head and
finished forcing her to gag before he let go. Darren turned to the Black Knight and asked, “what?” The Black Knight said, “there is an army massing in the city and on its way here my lord.” He looked away and said, “none of them are in armor.” Darren smiled and said, “so suicide then, well this should be fun.” The Black Knight said, “they have guns.”
Chapter Fifteen

Vot opened a folding beach chair on a hill overlooking the castle as Hendrick’s army moved in. He was in a blue Hawaiian shirt with brown and green palm trees, white cargo shorts, and a straw hat. He opened another chair then sat down in the first. Cathern walked over to the other chair and sat down. She handed Vot a glass with a yellow drink with chunks of pineapple and an umbrella. Vot looked at the glass and asked, “so my dear kitty what do we have here?” Cathern smiled and said, “my piss little man, with a hint of pineapple.” Vot took a drink and said, “pineapple and rum.” Cathern whispered, “with a hint of piss.” Cathern took a sip from her glass then she put it down on a small table between the two chairs. Vot turned to Cathern and asked, “so tell me kitty, why are you here?” Cathern smiled. Vot shifted his head trying to understand her. He asked, “where have you been Cathern? It was your job to try and stop me but, where were you?” Cathern leaned in and said, “I see what you are doing, and I know.” Vot leaned in and asked, “what am I doing kitty?” Cathern leaned in and whispered something to Vot that made him smile.

Darren came out of his chambers wearing his crown and a flak jacket with a bulletproof vest underneath. Around his waist was a belt with a gun on
both hip and one being carried appendix style. He had two Mac 10 machine pistols one in each hand. The jacket, vest, and guns weighed him down forcing him to walk a little stilted. All around him people were mounting fifty-caliber machine guns on walls and placing mortar launchers in place. The Black knight walked up to Darren. He was still in his armor, but he had a Barrett 50-caliber rifle in his arms. He said, “Sir, we sent out the mines as well as three-man teams with long guns for the sniping.” The Black knight looked Darren over and asked, “you do know that as a knight you are basically immortal?” Darren said, “if I want your opinion then I’ll shoot at you. Gather everyone together.” Darren put the Mac 10s down and took off the flak jacket. He stepped onto a crate and turned to speak to his people, “today we teach those people you don’t fight world war three with world war one weapons. Today we fight for what we want and what we deserve.”

Three boys with claymore mines went from tree to tree setting the mines with thin tripwires. One of the boys spotted the first of Hendrick’s troops moving in. He pointed at a row of mines and mimed an explosion. The boys ducked behind a tree when one of them took a good look at one of the mines and the words, “front toward enemy.” He tapped the shoulder of one of the other boys and asked, “do you know how
“to read?” The other boy asked, “why, there isn’t no nothing to read here?” one of the soldiers tripped a wire, and the mine exploded away from him and at the boys setting off the rest of the mines in secession toward the castle wiping out all the teams setting the bombs. The steel ball-bearings effectively cleared all the trees and brush from around the castle. Darren lowered his binoculars and said, “well I guess I should have seen that coming.” He raised one of the Mac 10s and shot the Black knight. He hit the ground near the Tan Knight. The Black knight said, “oh thank god now I can get away from this mistake.” His body vanished. The man that set the mine off watched as the valley around the castle opened, and their field lost all its cover.

Vot leaned into Cathern and said, “the stage is set, and the players are ready, and all we have to do now is watch the fun.” Cathern asked, “fun…… how will watching two groups kill each other be fun?” Vot pointed to the tree line and said, “on this side, you have the Nazis from hell.” He pointed to the castle and said, “and on this side, you have drug dealers from hell. Both sides know that as they die they go back to hell and both sides are willing to die for men whom can’t die. It’s almost sad, well almost. Both sides could have turned this place into a paradise, but instead, most of them are going back to their own private hell.”
Cathern looked at this thing in man form and thought about how she wanted to skin him just a few days ago, but now she would do almost anything to make sure he wins. She asked, “so who do you think will win?” Vot smiled and said, “no one down there.” Vot sat up in his chair and pointed to the tree line saying, “here we go.”

The first of the soldiers came out of the tree line in their white uniforms with orange trim. They were spattered with mud and grass stains. Most of them had K98 Mauser bolt action rifles. A few of them had MG 42 light machine guns as well as a few with flamethrowers. A shot rang out, and one of the soldiers fell with a large hole in his helmet. The man who made the shot stood and yelled, “fuck you Nazi.” The soldiers opened fire on him cutting him down as both sides opened fire. The combination of automatic fire and sniper rounds kept the soldiers back in the trees. Darren ordered a barrage of mortars into the woods. The first three rounds fell short then the next six went past the mark. The second to the last mortar struck the wall sending shrapnel and smoke everywhere as they lost a couple of gun placements and the storage for the mortars. The blast knocked the last mortar back as it fired sending the shell up and back at the battery of mortars. Darren felt the heat from the blast as his skin blistered and his eyes burst in his head. The Tan knight got back to his feet and looked out the newly made
hole just in time to see a wave of white and orange men coming down the hill at the castle. He looked at Darren who was still alive and yelled, “find something white to wave in the air....... we surrender.........we surrender.”

The soldiers came to the wall and went for the hole as Darren’s men opened fire. Using their dead and fallen trees as cover, the soldiers picked off Darren’s untrained men. As they gunfire became one-sided, the soldiers brought in their flamethrowers and filled the opening with heat and death. The few of Darren’s men left dropped their guns and put their hands up only to be shot or set on fire. A voice came over the wall, “no surrender, no mercy. Kill them all.” People scrambled to get away from the opening and to anywhere they could either hide or a way out of the castle. The soldiers shot anyone they found at first, but they eventually changed over to knives and axes cutting down men women and children. A group of soldiers found Darren’s harem of cheerleaders. They made a deal with the girls that they could live if they don’t fight. After they were done, one of the soldiers went and brought in a man with a flamethrower, and they burned the girls alive to honor their king and his legacy. In their search, they found the burned and blind Darren. His jaw was broken, and he was having trouble breathing.
Darren was thrown at the feet of Hendrick who said, “this was a great victory and one that will live as long as people tell stories and speak the truth. To mark this victory, we need to keep this man alive and on display so everyone can see what will happen when you stand against New Berlin and your King.” Hendrick held his sword in the air as his men cheered. He ordered his men to set explosives and demolish the castle. Cathern said, “wow that was pretty one-sided.” Vot smiled as he replied, “yes, but this wasn’t the real battle. Having a weapon isn’t the same as knowing how to use it or how to employ battle tactics. Darren played too many video games, and a video game isn’t real life.” Cathern asked, “just how does this help you?” Vot said, “this isn’t the real battle.” Cathern shrugged her arms and asked, “where is the real battle then?” Vot’s grin went from amused to sadistic as he asked, “just how much do you know about Adam and Eve?” Cathern said, “not as much as I should, I guess.” Vot said, “this place was made for them to rule and only them and unlike the knights or even Cain they are invulnerable to harm and are as gods here. I would have loved to see what happened when Willy found that out.”
Tina was going around asking if anyone knew anything about the Scarlet Knight when she noticed a change in the city. She rounded a block and saw her first swastika. The street was lined with white swastika banners and covered in white rose peddles. She followed the peddles back to the center of town where the signs of a gathering were being cleaned. A woman with a broom stopped sweeping and asked Tina, “are you going to the war miss?” Tina walked over to her trying not to become the knight. She asked, “what war?” The woman said, “The king is going to war with the castle……. something about…… I don’t know... Jews?” Tina looked around at the empty cases and a few of the rifles that were left behind. The woman said to Tina, “he wants to beat the American to make up for the loss and someone called Hitler’s plans.” Of in the distance, they heard the mines going off decimating the trees around the castle. Tina ran to the main gate and the sounds of the battle. The woman dropped her broom and changed back into the Deceiver happy with doing his job.

A sound came out from the forest. A thump, thump, thump that was drawing closer to the city. Tina stopped and turned toward the forest when she saw the top of a head as it rose above the trees. The ground shook as the giant came closer and behind it was another giant. Tina turned around to go back into the
city only to find the gate closing and the door shut. She could hear alarm and panic. Both giants were naked and unarmed. They had to be at least thirty foot tall and somehow growing as they approached. The male pulled a tree out of the ground breaking off the limbs and the bottom of the trunk at the roots. He handed the tree to the woman and did the same thing with another tree for himself. Tina turned back to the wall and saw the guards were all gone. With the giants about five-hundred yards away Tina had to decide, stay and fight or flee. Tina turned and ran to the city going around to the other side away from the giants. She found people running away into the woods. At the wall, the gate was closed. A group of women was trying to open the gate, but they were unable to lift it by themselves. Tina became the Gold Knight, and she charged the gate lifting it up then in one screaming wrenching movement she pulled the gate off the wall and tossed it to the ground. The women stepped back and stood their ground not wanting to pass by the knight. Tina changed back to herself and said, “we need to get as many people out of here as we can.” One of the women said, “how can this be? You are just a girl?” A loud crash and thunderous cracking shuttered the wall going around the walled city. Tina turned back to the woman that spoke and said, “you can question me all you want on the outside of the wall.”
Tina and the woman were able to gather about fifty women and children and help them out of the city. The woman said, “my name is Talia, and this is my son Anton.” She pushed a young boy in front of her. Tina asked, “where are the men?” Talia said, “the castle.” Tina said how they should go to the castle, but Talia hesitated then she said, “they are at war, and we could be in danger.” She turned back to the city seeing the giants stomping down on what must be people as fires grew and the screams subsided. She turned back to Tina and said, “I think I know a better place to go.” Tina looked up just in time to see the Scarlet Knight streak across the sky and connect with the male giant. The male fell into the city shaking the ground. The woman struck the knight with a backhand sending him into the keep. The male got back up and struck the keep were the knight went inside, and the top of the glass and steel keep shattered and fell away. The last thing she saw of the city before it was blocked by the hills was of the giants stomping on something or someone.

The group made their way to the still lake then passed. A bright white light filled the sky coming from the city. The light reminded Tina of the movies and old footage of an atomic blast. A gust of wind rippled the water and struck the group, but it wasn’t strong enough to do any harm. A bright red streak hit the sky coming
from the city then as fast as it came the flash vanished leaving a negative black space where the light was. On the other side of the lake, the group entered a thick forest, and they made their way to an open part in the tree canopy. In the center of the opening, there was a stone table with a series of old melted candles and surrounded by old makeshift wooden chairs. Talia said, “from what we were told, this was used by the ancient people for ceremonies such as weddings and sacrifices. But we can’t stay here.” Tina asked, “too exposed?” Talia shook her head and whispered, “haunted.” Tina laughed but stopped when Talia didn’t join in. The group passed by the table and back into the forest until they came to the side of one of the mountains where she saw an opening. Talia said how this was an attempt by some people to tunnel through the mountain. She said, “about a month into the dig a dragon killed all the miners.” Tina went to laugh again when she saw the scorch marks and shadows of the people that died.

Earlier that day. The people around the ancient Roman city were on their knees in front of Adam and Eve. The two were still small and emaciated as they tried to stand. Vot slipped away hoping to get to the hill before the battle started. William pulled a bottle of wine from a bag and brought it over to Adam who was on his feet and looking better. By the short time, it took
William to approach Adam he was recovered and seemed taller than just a moment ago. Adam took the bottle and downed the wine in one go letting the wine cascade down his chest. He spun the bottle around, so he was holding the neck of the bottle. He smiled at William then he struck him with the bottle breaking it over his head. The others started to back away on their knees. Eve got to her feet, and together the two started to grow until they were ten-foot-tall. Adam said, “rejoice in the return of your gods.” Eve said, “and despair in your end.”

William woke up by the lake not understanding what just happened. One minute he was in front of two legends the next he was here. He remembered handing Adam the bottle then Adam turned the bottle and him hitting the ground. His last memory was of Eve saying something about your end, but that didn’t make any sense. As he sat there, he saw a group of women and children making their way into the woods on the other side of the lake. He started to follow when an intense flash of light came from the city then the light turned red, and the ground shook. He said to himself, “follow them and see where they are going? Go back to the city? Go back to the new kingdom? What should I do?” William left the lake and made his way back to the ancient Roman city to see what happened after he was gone. He went a long way around to avoid the city, but
from a ridge, he could see the aftermath of the light, but he couldn’t see the city all he could see was a large bloom of smoke where the city should be. He turned to the ancient city and ran. At the base of the ridge overlooking the ancient city, he could see ruins and blood. He fell into a hole in the path that turned out to be a footprint. The footprints became smaller as he got closer to the city. At what was the entrance to the city he found the first of the bodies. A child of maybe nine or ten was crucified on an improvised cross. The body was broken as if something squeezed the life out of it.

Inside the courtyard, he found several spikes with people impaled on them with the spike going from crotch and out the mouth. Like the child at the gate, they were all squeezed by a large hand. At the center where the portal was, he found more bodies, but these bodies were ripped apart with the ground soaked in blood. Doing his best, he counted the bodies and saw that only about half of the city was there. He checked the storeroom only to find a large hole in the roof and their supplies covered in the foulest smelling urine he had ever smelled. An eye-watering acid smell that seemed to melt everything it touched. On the other side of the storage room, he found a blood trail and followed it to a small building. Inside he found the body of a lifeless woman and what was most likely her two children. From the look of them, the children had
found their mother’s body and dragged her here hoping she was going to be alright. William asked, “*what happened here?*” At first, the two children just stared at him, then the oldest at what must have been eight said, “*Mister God picked up one of the men and ripped his head off then Misses God picked up another and.*” The child made a breaking motion with her hands. She said, “*Missis God said we weren’t worthy to be there, so we had to be broken. We ran and hid, and some went out the back, but most of them stayed to be killed.*”

William Shook his head saying, “*this is why you don’t deal with a cult. Too many people willing to die for nothing but belief.*” William looked out into the courtyard at the portal then back to the two children. He asked the little girl, “*say are you a virgin?*” The girl backed away putting her hands between her legs to shield herself as she said, “*momma said I was too young for such stuff and they had to wait until I was at least thirteen.*” William smiled and said, “*no my dear I didn’t mean to take that away from you. In fact, I need you to be a virgin.*” The girl said, “*my name is Aelia, but most call me Allie and that is my six-year-old brother Tatius.*” William pointed to the body and asked, “*what was her name?*” Tatius said, “*momma.*” Hearing the names, William understood that they were among the people that lived in the ancient ruins after
the fall of Rome and the rise of the knights. These children were born in this place rather than being souls stolen from Hell. William asked Aelia, “can you read?” she held up her hand showing two fingers and said, “yes, but just a little.”

Aelia walked around the portal reading what she could. She turned to William and said, “the stone says that three untouched must put their hands in the water here, here and here.” As she said here, she pointed at three darker stones around the circle as if it was a clock at twelve o’clock, four o’clock and seven o’clock. William mouthed the word three. He said, “I guess we can search the ruins for another virgin.” Tatius pointed at a small dead child and said, “what about him?” William looked at the body then back to Tatius then back to the portal. Tatius said, “the magical stone thing doesn’t say they have to be alive.” The three of them went around the portal. Aelia put her hand in the water, and the water stopped circling. Tatius put his hand in the water and a light formed in the center then the image of a sidewalk appeared. William put the hand of the dead child in the water, and it started to ripple then the image became clear. Aelia tried to pull her hand out, but it was stuck. Tatius did the same with the same result. As they struggled, the two went deeper into the water. William figured
that when they fell in the portal would close, so he jumped into the water.

William fell into a warm, dry day. The sun was overhead, and it was as hot as the desert city he lived in before he moved to his final city where he died. The city looked like any other nondescript city in the western part of the United States. Aelieia and Tatius landed behind him on the sidewalk. William thought about the Blue Knight and the armor, but nothing happened. He turned to the two children and said, “well good luck, I’m off to find the book and take back what should be mine.” The two looked at each other then back to William. On this side of the portal, they couldn’t understand what he was saying. William looked around and saw a library, but the name of the town was gone. The building was being renovated, and most of the official branding was missing. For a second, he thought this place seemed familiar, but he put that behind him and walked into the library. He walked past a bulletin board with wanted photos and made his way to a computer. The web browser needed a password, so he walked over to a clerk and asked for help. She gave him the daily password then she assigned him a computer. After he left, she called the police. William started the computer, and the logo for the New Kent Library appeared on the screen. William looked over at the counter only to see the clerk was
gone. He got up and made his way to the door stopping at the bulletin board and seeing his face and in bold print under the picture, “wanted for the deaths of over twenty children.” He stepped out and was surrounded by police screaming, “freeze.”

People passed by Aelia and Tatius giving the two strangely dressed children a wide birth. They were talking into strange black mirrors in a language that didn’t sound real to either of the two children. A man came from behind them and said, “come with me” in a language they could understand. He said, “they can’t see me, but you can....... OK, I guess it should be obvious that you can see me because you are looking at me.” He gave Aelia an envelope and said, “when the people in charge ask you where you come from give them the note and don’t say anything else about it. This is your new world, and you can live and grow here, but you can’t tell them where you came from because they won’t understand....... Speaking of which.” The man gave them each a pendant on a gold chain. He said, “this will help you understand them. Eventually, you will adapt to the new language but until that happens never take these off.” Aelia put the necklace on, and all the strange noises became words. It was some sort of singing coming from a box a man had on a stoop. The man said, “if all goes well then this will be the last time you see me, but I will watch over you from now on.”
The man stepped back away from the two as he was enveloped in a white light. He formed two white feathered wings and vanished.

A large creature flew overhead. Bill looked around trying to see where he was. He walked over to the edge of what was a large plateau in the side of one of the mountains. The plateau was lined with stone with a large stone table in the middle and lined with stone chairs. There didn’t seem to be a way to get down or for people to get up to this place. Off in the distance, Bill could see something large moving in on the city. One of the shapes kicked the wall as pieces flew into the sky. Bill became the Scarlet Knight and took off into the sky on the way to the city. He passed a group of people as he passed over their heads. One of them seemed familiar, but that didn’t make any sense. He passed by and sped up. The closer he got, the more he could see it was a man and a woman. They had to be over thirty-foot tall and completely naked. The man was swinging a tree trunk as the woman was stomping on people in the street. Bill reached his top speed and collided with the man knocking him down. The woman swung connecting with the Knight sending him into the keep.
Bill found himself in his apartment in the keep. He had crashed through the window and landed on the pool table. The building rocked then shifted to one side then back the other way. Bill got to his feet then back down as the building shifted back with a crash. The world seemed to slow down as the building shifted and everything went sideways. Bill looked out the window and saw the ground coming closer. The top of the keep was knocked away. The pool table crashed against the window along with the furniture as the building shifted. Bill got to his feet and jumped out a window and back onto the street. He looked up just as the woman stomped her foot down. He shifted to the left just missing her foot. Both the man and the woman started to stomp trying to stop the knight. The man kept going after the knight as the woman went after a new target. Bill saw a man and a woman trying to flee. He stopped too soon, and the man connected with a stomp. The knight hit the ground underneath the man’s foot. The armor shifted and distorted. He felt the man grind his heel into him just as a blinding white light encircled them.

A figure came out of the light. The new man was as tall as the man and woman dressed in a white pair of pants with large white feathered wings. The man and woman stopped and backed away. As they backed away, the two started to shrink. The winged
man shrunk with them until they were shorter than Bill. The winged man was about seven-foot tall and changed into something else. His skin turned red, and the feathers fell out revealing bat wings. Lucifer said, “wow after all those years in the void you two still have not learned your lesson.” Lucifer waved his hands, and the man and woman went to their knees. He said, “Adam, Eve I was going to let this slide but as before you are not allowed to kill the holder of the book.” Bill mouthed the names, “Adam and Eve.” Lucifer turned to Bill and said, “witness this and learn.” The white light shifted to a red as the land where the keep fell away revealing the void. Bill took to the sky as the city fell into the void. Lucifer, Adam and Eve remained where they were suspended in the air. The red light and the smoke cleared revealing a pile of rubble where the city once was. Standing on the pile were Lucifer, Adam and Eve. Lucifer said, “did you think I was going to send you back there? No, I have another plan.” Lucifer raised his hands. As he did, Adam and Eve lifted into the air and a bright light formed around them. The light grew bright eclipsing the bodies. The light then shrunk down fading until all that was left were two glass spheres. Lucifer said, “here are your own universes. Millions of stars with nothing living but you and no way out.”
Hendrick had his men tie Darren onto a litter and carried back to the city. He planned to put him on display as proof he was the true king and what would happen to anyone that would question his authority. Off in the distance, they could hear a thump, thump and the ground started to shake. They could see a shape entering the city and something flying their way. A piece of the city wall landed nearby. Hendrick changed back into the Orange Knight and pulled his sword. He ordered his men to drop Darren, then he drove his sword into him through the visor and out the back of his head. The body twitched then vanished. Hendrick pointed his sword to the city and screamed, “charge!” His soldiers didn’t know the command, but when Hendrick took off, they followed him. As they crested the hill a bright white light covered the city. Hendrick stopped, and his man smashed into him. He got to his feet as the light turned red. In the red-light Hendrick saw a large batwing. The ground shook, and the red light filled the valley then flashed out. When they could see again, they could see the city was gone.

Standing in the rubble was the Scarlet Knight. Hendrick pulled his sword and started to go after Bill when he remembered the stories about Adam and Eve. Hendrick pointed to the city and yelled, “what happened?” Bill let the armor fade away. He looked at Hendrick then back to the ruins that were the city and
said, “I think I just saw Adam, Eve and the Devil. I don’t know why he destroyed the city. He said he wanted me to witness something, but I don’t understand what.” The crowd parted, and Vot walked up to Hendrick and Bill. Vot turned to the soldiers and said, “to the west deep in the forest you will find an ancient city that will serve well as a new home, but none of you may enter the ruins.” One of the men walked up to the edge of the ruins and said, “no one tells my king no.” He put his leg over the border, and his leg dissolved. Hendrick remembered this from the barrier that blocked access to the old castle that was the foundation for his city. The Soldier fell into the field dissolving the rest of him down to the top of his boot that fell away with the foot inside. Hendrick pointed his sword toward the ancient city and said, “go, and I will join you when I’m done here.”

Bill saw the swastikas on all the men then on Hendrick. Bill looked back to the castle. Hendrick said, “I served my Fuhrer up until my death and beyond. When I built my kingdom, I made my master race and eliminated the unworthy. It’s why Nadia had to go.” Bill took a step back away from Hendrick who went on saying, “Hitler had it all wrong. Trying to build a master race surrounded by dirt people was never going to work. I will build a world for the worthy.” Bill asked, “you’re a Nazi?” Hendrick smiled and asked,
“what are you kidding? I mean I know you’re an American but just how stupid are you?” Bill looked at one of the spheres then back to Hendrick asking, “how can you be a Nazi?” Hendrick said, “I wanted to be someone important, and no one back in Germany was as important as the members of the party, and the most important were the officers and confidants of Der Fuhrer my Hitler.” Hendrick walked behind Bill and went on saying, “there will be changes, and many of the knights won’t be welcome in my new kingdom, but that doesn’t mean you can’t stand at my side.”

Bill stepped back and became the Scarlet Knight. He pulled his sword and said, “I could never knowingly support someone like you.” Hendrick backed away as he became the Orange Knight saying, “don’t let those ordinary useless platitudes of the past prevent you from becoming something great. Be a god not a slave to conventionality.” Bill raised his sword and said, “I could never serve the likes of you.” Bill jumped up and came down with the blade just as Hendrick pivoted away but not in time as the blade connected with his arm smashing the armor and sending blood out of the seams. Hendrick thrust his blade at Bill as Bill stepped aside and struck Hendrick in the wounded arm breaking the bone. Bill said, “I don’t think I can really kill you, but I can make this hurt.” Hendrick said, “you can hurt me, and I am
powerless to touch you, but I made sure your bitch died screaming and went back to the hell she deserves.” Bill formed his shield and using it to block Hendrick’s blade he thrust his sword into Hendrick’s stomach and out the back. He said to Hendrick, “my grandfather served in the war, and my grandmother made it out of the camps. I want you to know the grandson of a Russian Jew beat you.” Bill pulled his sword and Hendrick fell with his blood covering the ground.

Bill woke up in his bed back in his parent’s house. He went into his parent’s room and found a photo album from his maternal grandparents. His mother’s father was in the army and had jumped into the war on D-day with his airborne division. His future wife was just seven when the Russian army liberated the camp where she was being held and where the rest of her family died. At the age of twelve, Adina Baran fled Russia and made her way to a distant relation in the small community of Lodi, Ohio. At the age of eighteen, she met a clerk named William Blake working at a gas station in Medina who would eventually become her husband. Bill was named for this man, but he never got the chance to meet him. He died in a botched robbery of his gas station about the time Nancy was five-years-old. His grandmother died when he was six, but he remembered everything she
ever told him or what he remembers her telling him. Neither of his parents was religious, so religion never played a part in his life. What he remembered most and was reinforced in the first comic his uncle gave him was something his grandmother said, “you must stand for what you believe in and be prepared to fight for it because your beliefs are all that you have.” Bill couldn’t remember the context of what she said only that it meant something to her, so he remembered her words.

Tina and the others made it to the city just as the Scarlet Knight vanished. The city was gone but so was all the Nazi propaganda. Vot stepped out of the rubble and walked over to Tina. He said, “to the west, you will find a new place to live in safety. Tina, you should turn back to the knight until you get there just in case.” Vot walked over to the two spheres and handed one to Tina then he put the other one in a bag and put it over his shoulder. Vot told her to keep the ball safe and away from the light. Tina turned to the others and said, “come with me. We can make something better than this fake shallow hallow existence. Come with me, and we can make a place that will be for everyone and not just those few people that can enforce their will. Come with me.” Together they made their way to the ancient Roman city. Vot said to Tina, “I made sure to clean the city after Adam
and Eve killed everyone, so you should be able to move in along with the others.” Tina, asked, “Adam and Eve?” She turned to Vot, but he was gone. The group made it to the city with no trouble and found the soldiers. They had discarded their uniforms and removed all the Nazi emblems.

About an hour after they arrived the city was coming back to life with people cleaning and moving into their new homes. Hendrick walked into the courtyard. He was in his armor with the crown and cape. He yelled, “well my people this will be my new kingdom, and here we will build a future for all that matter.” A rock came across the courtyard and hit Hendrick then another. Someone yelled, “we don’t need a king here.” After another couple of rocks, Hendrick yelled, “who do you think you are. I am the king of this land.” The Gold Knight walked over to Hendrick and said, “your day as our king is over. You aren’t welcome here.” The crowd cheered as Hendrick was hit with more rocks. Hendrick stepped out of the courtyard and turned around saying, “I am the one that saved all of you from your own hell, and you owe me.” A black spear pierced Hendrick from behind. The Black Knight said to him, “they don’t owe you anything. You took away their chance to redeem themselves. That ends today. there is no place here for you.” Hendrick fell and vanished.
There was a loud knock at the door, and someone yelled, “FBI we have a warrant.” Bill became the Scarlet Knight and vanished as the FBI raided the house. He watched as they tore the place apart looking for something. Behind the FBI were men with ATF and DEA on their jackets. One of them found his father’s laptop, and he bagged it along with all the files from his mother’s office. One of the men with DEA said, “our surveillance team in Mexico is following the man, but we still don’t have the woman.” Another said, “the brother is in New York and living well above his means…… any sign of the son?” The Scarlet Knight slipped out of the house and made his way to his motel room. He landed on the roof that overlooks his room and saw the FBI inside. Just in case he had a problem, Bill took some of his cash and the gun from his friend and hid them under a bolder in the park. Bill looked at Tina’s house and wondered if they were being questioned. As he tried to think where he was going to go, it started to snow. Winter was here, and his life was gone. All he had was the Scarlet Knight and revenge.
Chapter Sixteen

Frank woke up with a hangover in the back of a police car. He was handcuffed with the cuffs behind him. One of the officers said something in Spanish that Frank didn’t understand. The other officer in the front of the car said, “just relax. We will be at the border soon.” Frank said, “you can’t do this. I have rights I can fight extradition.” The English-speaking officer said, “you don’t know your DEA, do you? You think you’re on your way to trial.” The other officer said in Spanish, “you’re on your way to a shallow grave in the desert.” Frank said, “I can pay you.” The second officer said, “with what? The feds took all your money.” Frank sat as far back in the seat as he could as the officers laughed. The English-speaking officer said, “they say your son was responsible for a terrorist level attack in your country with his drug.” The car came to a stop near a building in the middle of nowhere. The officers took Frank out and nearly carried him inside where he saw a well-lit concrete tunnel that ran north. Before they parted the English-speaking officer said, “just tell them what you know and who knows you might just live long enough to get the needle or electric chair.”

Nancy sat on the edge of the hotel’s roof as the police moved in. It was night, but New York was truly
the town that didn’t sleep with lights and people everywhere. Almost everyone had their phones pointed at her recording her as she stared down at the street below. A few yelled, “jump” while others just remained quiet, but no one moved in to try and help her. An hour ago, she found a note from George saying how he was grateful for all she had done for him and the money. After a few checks on her phone, she found that he took almost all the money. His note went on to say, “I liked our time together, but I could never be serious with someone like you, cheap trash.” She wanted to be mad, but her last words to her son were worse than anything George wrote. She directed one of the people near her with a phone and said, “Bill I never meant what I said. You were the best of us, and I was lucky to just be your mother.” Nancy got to her feet and jumped. George watched her video go viral as the authorities tried to pull it from the internet. In the private plane he hired, he had over ninety million in cash, bonds, and other assets. He spent their time together slowly siphoning the cash off for his move now all he had to do was fly away and enjoy his money. The last thing he heard was a thump and the engine winding up before the blast.

Bill found an abandoned building by the river and set up a hammock up in the rafters. The snow was growing deep, and the streets were impassable. A
nearby home had an exceptional Wi-Fi signal giving him a connection to the internet where he found the video of his mother. He replayed and replayed the video including the jump. A new feed covered the explosion of a plane over the water leaving New York and another video covered the arrest of Frank Martin in connection with the new drug and the fire at the high school. Off in the distance, he could hear the city. People digging their way out of the snow, the families enjoying that first coating with snow angels and snowmen. He closed his eyes and found himself next to a lake. The cold seemed to follow him as a breeze went across the water. Bill became the Scarlet Knight and went to the castle. Up in the air, he could see the tree line around where the castle should be was gone along with the castle. Sitting in the middle of the ruins was the Silver Knight.

The Scarlet Knight landed near the Silver and said, “so much for your kingdom.” The Silver Knight turned to the Scarlet and said, “just shut the fuck up Bill. I don’t need your shit right now.” Darren took his helmet off and turned to the Scarlet Knight. Bill turned back to himself and backed away. Darren stood up and said, “yes, it’s me the better son. I was to take control of this place and become like a god to these people, and all I had to do was kill you when the time was right.” Bill asked, “when was that time?” Darren said,
“it doesn’t matter anymore. They took everything from me here and back on the other side.” Bill became the Scarlet Knight and asked, “you killed Brenda, you killed Jennifer and Jason how could you do that, why would you do that?” Darren said, “I thought I was going to be someone special and that you and the others were holding me back. I couldn’t see how they were using me. you do know that they are using you don’t you.” Bill asked, “so now what? Do we fight? Are you ready to kill me?” Darren tossed his helmet at Bill and said, “I think my part of your story is over and I just want to sit here and wait to see what’s next.”

Tina watched the news as Bill’s life unraveled. His father’s arrest, his mother’s death and the death of the uncle were capped by the arrest warrant issued for Bill. It was unclear if he was wanted as a conspirator or as a witness. The DEA found enough of the drug to put whoever they found responsible away for the rest of their lives. She looked over and saw the book next to her bed. Tina asked the book, “where is Bill?” The book didn’t answer. She asked, “why did Bill have you and why didn’t you give him anything?” The book didn’t answer. She asked, “did you use Bill to get to me so I can stop the Scarlet Knight?” The book didn’t answer. She asked, “where is Bill?” The book didn’t answer. Tina picked up the book and put it in a dresser drawer. She sat back down on her bed and asked,
“what can I do to save Bill.” In the corner of her eye, she saw something move. She turned and saw the book on a chair blocking the door. Tina said, “show me.” The book didn’t answer. Tina picked up the book and tossed it across the room. The book opened and gave her an answer.

The book was open to a page showing two knights fighting among fallen bodies. One of the knights was guarding a group of small figures while the other seemed to be out for blood. The drawing was in black and white with no way to tell who the knights were, but Tina knew she would never go after people like that and the Scarlet Knight was wrong. She asked the book, “where can I find the Scarlet Knight?” The book didn’t answer. Tina stood tall and became the Gold Knight. She drew her sword and pointed it at the book. She demanded, “show me where I can find the Scarlet Knight.” The book closed, and Tina’s armor vanished. She went to her knees and tried to open the book, but the pages were sealed tight. She put the book on the top of a dresser and stepped back. Tina thought about the armor, but nothing happened. She asked the book, “how can I stop him without the armor?” The Book opened, and Tina was the knight again. On the open page was an image of a book surrounded by the bodies of several knights and the word, “eternal.”
Darren watched Hendrick walk out of the tree line and back again. He did this several times as if he didn’t know what he was doing or was trying to talk himself into whatever he had planned. Darren upended two stone blocks about ten feet from each other and sat on one of them waiting for Hendrick to make up his mind and come down. After a half an hour, Darren pulled his sword and drove it into the ground between the two blocks then he sat down and waited. Hendrick walked down and put his sword next to Darren’s sword. He sat down and faced his sworn enemy and asked, “now what?” Darren smiled and asked, “why are we enemies?” Hendrick stared at him. Darren said, “I was promised to become the next king by that little thing called Vot. He didn’t say anything about you. I’m guessing you were told you would remain king if you stop me.” Hendrick said, “it does seem like we were set against each other so we could be replaced by someone else.” Darren asked, “the giants?” Hendrick shook his head saying, “no, Adam and Eve were never going to be able to stay long. I think it was either the girl or the Blue Knight.” Darren looked at his sword then back to Hendrick and asked, “Adam and Eve?”

Aelia and Tatius sat in a room together wearing hospital gowns and waiting to see what was next. They
both refused to take off the necklaces as per David’s instruction. The paper David gave them to give to the authorities said they were born and raised in a cult that had no contact with the outside world. They were raised with no running water, electricity or any of the conveniences of the modern world. The note made no mention of William Grader, and the police didn’t look for one. They told the two that they would be placed in a group home until they could find someplace better. Across town, William was in a cell waiting to see where he would be extradited to or would the feds take over. Only the state of Washington wasn’t seeking the death penalty, but William knew that if they knew what he did there, they wouldn’t wait for the trial. A deputy sheriff was from Hiram, Ohio and he had the Akron Beacon Journal mailed to him. The paper talked about the FBI raiding a local house and the search for a missing boy.

Bill woke up in the dark with a thin layer of ice covering his blanket. A fire would generate smoke which would bring the fire department. He would have to find a better place to stay, somewhere warmer and safer. He wondered if he should turn himself in and face whatever was waiting for him. He couldn’t see going to see Tina and dragging her into his problems. He knew he would never see her again to keep her safe. He could see just staying as the Scarlet Knight
and letting Bill Martin fade away. He justified this thought with the idea that he was never really someone that mattered as himself but as the Scarlet Knight he could matter. He wouldn’t have any money for food or a place to live, but he would matter. If he disappeared he would need the book as well as any information, he could find. The book should help him blend in by changing his looks like it did before. Bill jumped out of the hammock and down to the ground changing into the knight on the way down. He decided to go back and search for the book back at the house and if necessary the police station.

The Scarlet Knight flew over the city looking for a place to stay while he planned out how he would come out to the public as a hero. Every fiber of Bill’s body tingled over the idea of becoming that hero that saves the day. He would sacrifice all he was to make the Scarlet Knight a force in the world. He came down in a tent city near the center of the city of Akron. He walked around listening to the people go about their everyday lives as if it wasn’t unusual to live in a tent. A block or two away was Canal Park were the AA Rubber Ducks play, and another block was the University of Akron. Bill lived all his life within the small community of Cuyahoga Falls, but he knew about the politics of Akron and how the poor were being forced out. He turned to leave when he came
face to face with a small child holding an action figure of Superman. Somehow the boy could see him. Bill took to the sky with the young boy watching him. He landed on a building near the Haven of Rest ministries where they were taking people in for the night. All over the city, people were doing good without hurting others. Bill stared at his armor and wondered why he thought might made right and was there a better way. A sound came out of the night that woke Bill, and he became the Scarlet Knight again.

Antonio Angelo Augustus was once a respectable man with a respectable business. He ran a door-to-door rug cleaning service. A one-man operation that was just enough to pay the bills but not enough for anything else. His wife Gina Angeline worked as a waitress in a local diner near Exchange street, but her employer was being forced out by the college so they could expand their housing. At their lowest, they turned to a neighbor named Jacks and started to sell his magic drug. The drug was at first a miracle for them as well as everyone who took it. Soon that miracle became a nightmare as the addicts found where they lived and harassed them for their next fix until the drug stopped working. Overnight the drug nicknamed Greek Fire became an inert powdered form
of vitamin B-12. With the first snowfall of the year, Antonio and Gina knew they had to get out of town with their daughter Angeline Gina Annabella Augustus before they became another statistic. Along Exchange street, they passed four men. One of them knew their car.

Greg Vera needed a fix. He had started to fix his life with the help of this wonder drug, but now that the drug was gone he was back on the street. His brother Freddy was worse off with his addiction turning him almost feral. They raided a drug house and found nothing but the worthless powder. As he stood there, he saw a car coming closer. He pulled out one of the bricks of the drug and tossed it at the car striking the windshield. The car swerved heading off the road onto some train tracks. The car bounced on the road. The driver wasn’t wearing his seat belt and had struck his throat on the steering wheel. The car stalled and came to a stop. Gina screamed as Angie unbuckled her seat and slid into the footwell hoping to not be seen. Antonio listed to one side passing out with his head in Gina’s lap. Gina screamed again for her husband than her daughter. Greg pelted the car until the hood was covered in a thick white powder. The two men that came with them pulled Angie out of the back then they went for Gina.
Along the train tracks, the Scarlet Knight saw a family with a car off to the side and a group of men rocking the car back and forth. The men seemed angry about something, but nothing was ever as clear as it appeared in the comics or the movies. No followable plot or word balloons spelling out the why of the thing. The Scarlet Knight landed near the car. As he approached, he recognized one of the men. He was one of the dealers that worked for his brother. Two men were in the back of the car with one holding a woman down while the other raped her. A third and fourth waited nearby for their turn while they held a young girl. She was seven maybe eight-years-old with one of the men’s hands jammed between her legs. In the street and on the hood of the car was a white powder that wasn’t snow. The Scarlet Knight became visible and struck. He pulled out the man on top by his leg, and with a cracking sound, he broke the man’s leg. With one quick flowing movement, he threw a dagger at the man holding the woman striking him in the throat. He let her go, and she struggled to pull up her jeans while getting to the unconscious man in the front. The two men with the girl backed away. The one with his hand down her pants now had a knife at her throat.
The woman screamed out, “Angie.” The two men backed away following the wall along the tracks. The woman screamed, “please save my baby.” The Scarlet Knight shifted to the left and vanished out of their sight, but the girl could still see him. The Scarlet Knight walked up to the man holding the girl. She followed him as he got closer. The woman screamed for her daughter. Greg looked at the girl then down at the snow. He saw footprints moving closer and closer. Freddy stepped away and ran back to the car where he jumped onto the hood and started to eat the powder. Greg followed him with his eyes then he looked back to the snow. The Scarlet Knight became visible as he swung down cutting Greg’s arm off. Greg let go of the girl and backed away. The girl ran to her mother covered in Greg’s blood. Greg fell against the wall striking his head with a wet cracking thump. Freddy started to pound his fists into the hood and scream, “why is this not working.” He jumped off the hood and pulled a gun shooting at The Scarlet Knight. The rounds bounced off the armor. The slide locked back with the last round. Gina grabbed for the gun, but Freddy was quicker as he backhanded her. Gina hit the car and went down. Angie screamed. The knight grabbed Freddy’s arm and broke it in three places twisting it around and impaling his face on the gun. Angie saw something over The Scarlet Knight’s shoulder.
The Gold Knight struck down on the Scarlet knight knocking him down into the side of the car. The Scarlet Knight got back to his knees and started to go at her when she struck him in the left leg then down toward his head hitting his half-formed shield. The Scarlet Knight pulled his sword and thrust it at the Gold Knight forcing her back, but he dropped his sword while extending his arm. The initial hit had dislocated his shoulder. The Gold Knight struck back knocking large dents into his shield. Angie ran to the Scarlet Knight to try and block him, but he was able to push her away. Gina screamed as the Gold knight saw the Scarlet Knight push the girl. Something in the back of her mind broke. She knew he had to be stopped now. She swung down with her sword and pushed a hole into the shield and flung the sword away. The Gold Knight backed up and came down with her sword in one massive killing blow. Gina screamed for her daughter. Angie stood up and went between the wounded knight and the Gold Knight as she swung down. Gina screamed.

Tina watched it all in slow motion as the blade struck the girl in the head. She stood there for a moment as the woman in the car screamed. The girl had her arm up blocking the sword, but her arm started
to drop. The blade was buried in Angie’s head, but there was little blood. Angie’s eyes rolled back into her head, and she fell into the snow. The Scarlet Knight’s armor shifted, and his arm popped into place. He picked up his sword and pushed back at the Gold Knight. She let her sword drop staring at the girl. Angie twitched then was still. Gina screamed a sound more than just a morning more than just grief a sound that resonated in both Bill and Tina and would be there forever. All reason was gone in the Scarlet Knights eyes. Bill was gone, and only the red rage of the knight was left. He swung using both hands again and again as the Gold Knight backed away. She brought up her shield as The Scarlet Knight swung. With every blow, he changed from the superhero armor back to the medieval armor from the first day when Bill became the knight. The Gold Knight had to use both hands to hold her shield as the Scarlet Knight slammed into her until he broke her shield. The last blow split the shield spreading her arms, and he thrust his blade into her side as he pulled her close.

The wound didn’t hurt. Tina felt cold all over and weak as she felt her armor start to fade. The Scarlet Knights eyes were a red rage as he stared into her eyes. Bill watched as her armor faded and underneath was Tina. The red rage dropped as he let go of his sword and it vanished. When the sword was
gone, her pain jumped. Bill’s armor dropped as he fell to the ground with Tina. She looked into his eyes and wonder just how this could be. Bill heard someone saying, “oh my god, oh my god” before he realized it was him. Tina stared into Bill’s eyes and tried to say something, but her words were lost. The words faded from her sight as she slipped away. Bill looked at the blood on his hands then back to the dead girl on the ground. The woman inside the car with what must have been her husband was holding the man close and crying. Off in the distance, he heard a train coming. Bill let Tina down gently and went to the car. Gina screamed, “stay away from us monster.” She had a gun she took off the dead man in the back. Bill said, “there’s a train coming I have to move the car.” Gina cocked the hammer back on the cheap shiny little revolver. Bill tried to bring about the armor, but he lost the will. He said to Gina, “if that is what you want then go. Nothing matters anymore.” He picked up Tina’s body and carried her to a nearby church. As he walked, he heard the train strike the car derailing across the city of Akron in what would be a considerable mess.

Reverend Donald James was in his church helping with the overflow of people as the temperatures dropped along with the snow. He heard the train derail and ran to the door where he saw Bill with Tina’s body. He had Bill put her body down and
check for a pulse but found nothing. The wound went from the front to the back in a gash that was fatal. He looked to Bill and asked, “how did this happen?” Bill stepped back and became the knight, but he was different. The scarlet color was mixed with gold in his back were two gold and scarlet wings. The armor glowed with a scarlet red and bolts of gold light. Reverend James said, “Satan has no place in the house of God.” Bill looked at his hands. In this form, he was over ten foot tall and massively built. Reverend James said, “hell and damnation are waiting for you, monster.” Bill took off and flew toward his childhood home leaving Tina with the minister and his flock. He stopped long enough at his hiding spot to pick up his things then put something in the mail.

Vot leaned in and whispered to Cather, “this is like one of those soap operas people used to watch.” Cather fought back her tears and asked, “so what does this mean for them.... I mean what happens now. Did I?” Vot said, “did you lose. As soon as Hendrick lost his kingdom the contract was voided, and their souls were up for grabs, so you didn’t lose.” Cather sat forward and asked, “then why did you let this happen?” Vot said, “because I didn’t care about what you wanted, I wanted them and to get them this had to happen. Too much of our world has touched them changing their fate which would affect others. No, this
“was always going to happen.” Cathern asked, “now what?” Vot said, “let's watch and find out.” Vot sat back in his chair and watched Bill make his way into the house. He said, “I didn’t think much about this boy when I first saw him. I thought he was weak and small. Not a real pick of the litter, but he proved me wrong. The girl was the real get. He was destined to die alone in a studio apartment in his forties after one too many shots of booze.” Cathern asked, “what about her?” Vot smiled and said, “before I interfered with them tempting their relationship they were destined to never get together. She would marry the first guy she fucked getting pregnant and miscarry the baby three months after the marriage then after three years of marriage he would beat her to death after she forgot to close the garage one time too many.” Cathern asked, “I don’t understand you usually take people with bright futures?” Vot said, “I saw something in her that said she was someone worth saving and that was what I did. I saved her by killing her.”

Vot moved in closer to Cathern and said, “I’m poisonous to humanity. I didn’t know that back when I was first made so when I watched over Cain, I also poisoned him. He was a good boy that was corrupted by temptation, and that was my fault. Even after I realized my effect on humanity, I still stayed by his side corrupting him into the man he was until that
corruption made him give up on everything and everyone.” Cathern asked, “is that what this was all about? Your need to atone for your sin?” Vot frowned then he smiled and said, “I don’t sin. I was made to both corrupt and protect. I don’t have feelings I was built to serve and to serve I must have loyalty to the one I serve, and that loyalty can be mistaken for feelings but don’t make that mistake. I killed plenty of humans.” Cathern looked to Tina and asked, “what about her?” Vot smiled and said, “soon, but for now, we should watch the boy and what he does next.”

The house was in ruins with graffiti, broken glass and holes in the walls. The front door was kicked in, and a mob of people went to town on what was left. The ice and snow were coming in through the broken windows. Given the news about his brother and his drug as well as how the authorities thought his parents were also a part of the lethal epidemic, Bill wasn’t surprised to see the house in ruins. It was as if society itself lashed out. On a wall in the living room, Bill found a family photo that no one touched. The picture was in front of his father’s business taken about a year before it all went wrong. He could remember thinking how everything was better then but now he can see all the flaws. Darren standing there alone with his family, Brenda with her fake smile trying to hide what she really felt, the twins both already high, and his mother
desperately trying not to stare at his uncle George. What really surprised him was the look of almost jealousy on his uncle’s face. He thought, “was he jealous of our family?” Bill put the picture down.

Something didn’t feel right. Bill went into the bathroom, but most of the fixtures were busted. The mirror was busted, but he could still see himself. He was taller than before with large red streaks branching out from his eyes which were a glowing scarlet. The streaks were expanding from his face down his body to his hands and feet. The image in the mirror changed to Tina and how she looked in his arms after he killed her. He thought about the tent city and the homeless. He thought about all the people he killed. He said to himself, “how can I be a hero.” He looked back into the broken mirror and saw himself as he was before the knight. He felt a pain in his neck. The image slowly changed with him growing as his eyes turned red and the armor materialized. He turned and pushed out the wall stepping out of the house and into the snow. He could see red and blue lights coming down the street. The police were on the way. Bill looked back and saw himself lying on the floor in the bathroom with a piece of glass in his neck. His place in this world was gone, but his story wasn’t over yet.
Off in the distance, he saw a flash of light and a rising sun in the middle of the night. The sun was coming over a series of mountains that shouldn’t be there. Everywhere the light touched changed from his neighborhood to this other place. Eventually, he was on the other side for good. He was in the medieval armor and was over ten-foot tall. He had no way to make up for what he had done, but he could do something about this place, and he knew where to start. Vot said to Cathern, “I have one more job for him then we can finish with our business.” Cathern asked, “what job?” Vot smiled and said, “keep watching. This is something that only happens once every four hundred years.” Bill put out his right hand, and a war hammer appeared. His eyes glowed red, and the armor took on the appearance of fire. The large scarlet and gold wings spread, and he went off into the sky. Cathern asked, “what if he finds the girl?” Vot waved his hand in a dismissing fashion and said, “she isn’t here.”

Darren put an “X” on the ground and said, “so if you take this part of the woods then I want that part next to the lake.” Hendrick said, “that works for me as long as I get the old city over here.” Darren replied, “this one yes, but the one with the portal needs to be Switzerland.” Hendrick chuckled saying, “if you mean German-speaking and Nazi-friendly then yes.” Darren said, “this won’t work unless we can recruit for our
teams.” Hendrick shook his head on the word “team.” Darren angrily replied, “countries then…… what does it matter as long as we can use each other to keep power.” Hendrick said, “I was a king, and you were a poison dealer.” Darren replied, “I looked you up. You were a clerk who liked to watch people burn. You became king because you were the closest to the throne, not the worthiest.” Hendrick replied, “I’ll show you how worthy I am when I take your head.” Darren put up his hand and said, “we already tried that. We are too evenly matched as well as immortal. Fighting was getting us nowhere.” Hendrick saw something off in the distance. A red streak coming across the sky. Darren looked over and saw the Scarlet Knight. He said, “I guess it’s time to kill Bill volume three.” Hendrick said, “I don’t understand?”

The Scarlet Knight landed near the two men. Darren was in his armor, but his helmet was off to the side. Hendrick smiled and said, “my boy I’m so happy to see you and so…. Well, this changes everything.” The Scarlet Knight lifted his hammer. Hendrick said, “yes, help me take back my kingdom.” The Scarlet Knight brought his hammer around and slammed into Hendrick tossing his body across the ruins. Darren laughed saying, “nice shot little bro. Maybe I’m wrong about you. Together we can make this place our own.” Darren got to his feet and walked over to the Scarlet
Knight. The closer he got, the more he saw just how big Bill was now. Darren said, “well I did try.” He pulled his sword and swung at the knight. The blade struck and shattered. Darren backed away as his armor vanished. The Scarlet Knight said, “the time of the knights is over.” Darren stepped back tripping over Hendrick. His body was still there, but he was gone. Darren looked back at the Scarlet Knight and said, “I’m your brother you can’t do this.” The Scarlet Knight said, “this is for Brenda, Jason, and Jennifer. This is for all those you harmed.” The Scarlet Knight swung down and connected with Darren’s head.

The Scarlet Knight’s armor vanished leaving Bill standing near his brother’s body. All the red rage was gone, and he was his own man again. He still had his sword, but the blade was a basic metal with no trace of the scarlet. The sword felt like it was vibrating. Vot turned to Cathern and said, “well I’m up.” He appeared to Bill and said, “take that sword to the grand meeting table and break it. When you do, you will be done here, and a new time will begin.” Bill asked, “will I be a part of that or am I going to hell?” Vot said, “you were chosen to take on this task as the last knight. What happens to you is up to you, but if you let me, I can take you to a place where I know you will be happy and find someone who is waiting for you.” Vot vanished. Bill walked around the lake and into the
woods. He found a large table in the middle of an opening in the canopy of trees. The table was the birthplace of the age of knights where the first of them met. Bill walked around the table with the blade until he found a marking that matched. He swung the blade down, and the table shook. He did it again and the table cracked than shattered. The ground shook as the woods caught fire along with the grass and Bill was consumed in flames.

Hendrick woke to the smell of body odor, urine, and feces. It was dark, but he could see he wasn’t alone. The ground shifted, and a light went by showing him he was in something enclosed and moving. He was on a train. He bumped into someone, and that person said, “excuse me” in German. The car came to a slow stop, and the side doors opened with men in uniforms screaming, “get out, get out.” He was pushed out in a rush of people into a blinding spotlight. In the light, he could see the others from the train. Most of them were gaunt, and all of them were in black and white uniforms with a red upside-down triangle and a number. The light shifted, and he saw the sign off in the distance, “Arbeit Macht Frei” or “work sets you free.” He knew where he was. This was Auschwitz, he was home. Hendrick said, “no, this is hell.” A voice from the crowd said, “there is a man here who likes to watch people burn alive.” Another
said, “if there were a god then those monsters would be here facing justice.” Hendrick said, “there is a god, and he is fire. God is glorious.”

Cathern walked into the room where her daughter was staying ever since her death. Kaylee spent her days staring out the window wondering why her family abandoned her not being able to understand why she was alone. The drugs the doctors gave her were debilitating but so was the outburst of emotion and violent acts. The state was going to commit her into an institution making her a prisoner for the rest of her life. Vot told her to walk up and say her name. Cathern walked up and said, “Kaylee.” At first, she didn’t move. Kaylee said, “I waited and waited, but you never came.” Cathern said, “I’m here now.” Kaylee saw her mother’s reflection in the window. A fog lifted from her mind and she remembered all that happened. Cathern said, “you can stay here and face whatever these small people are going to do, or you can come with me to a place that will be a fresh start away from the past.” Kaylee asked, “will you be there?” Cathern said, “I will be with you as long as I can.” Kaylee said, “let’s go home.” Later that day her body was found in her chair with a smile on her face.
Dale Graham sat on his porch overlooking a weather-worn street in a southern California clement that never changed. His retirement wasn’t going as well as he hoped with his children constantly on the move and his grandkids too busy to see their gramps. He had to stop watching the television with its coverage of the events back in Ohio. He knew most of the players in the story, but the narrative was off. The news was saying how Bill was a part of his brother’s drug empire, but he knew Bill, and that was not him. He couldn’t help but feel that if he had stayed then maybe Bill would be alive. From an early age he was always busy, but now all he had was this seat and the slow march to the grave. The mailman brought him a package. He said, “hey old man this is from that place back east with all the killing.” Dale looked at the return address. It was his store on Second street with a code, “SBB.” The code was Skinny Boy Bill. It was mailed on the day he died. The mailman said, “make sure it isn’t ticking.” He laughed and walked away.

Inside the box were an envelope and two boxes. Inside the smaller box, Dale found the disassembled revolver he accidentally gave Bill. The rounds were gone, but it was clear the gun was never fired since he took it off the robber all those years ago. On the second box was a message, “please read the note first.” Dale put the box down and opened the envelope.
It said, “if you are reading this then I think I’m dead. I know right. Its hard to put into words what I am feeling, and no amount of talk can make up for what I have done. Let me start by saying I was never really a part of Darren’s business. Not really. I sold someone some aspirin and maybe a small bag of weed, but I was not a part of the other. You were my only true friend, and I need you to know I tried to stay who I was for as long as I could. I wanted to be a hero, but I had no idea what a real hero was. I thought the pages of the comics and the characters within were heroes and a template to making the world better, but life isn’t a comic book. You don’t fight addiction by killing dealers, you help the addicts get clean. There will always be dealers as long as there is a consumer base. A hero doesn’t throw a punch he lends a hand. My motivations where less than heroic so I failed. There is so much more I could tell you, but the more I say, the crazier I sound. In the box, there is a series of comic books and going back to that crazy thing they are all true. Do with them what you want. Personally, I would burn them. I also included a red leather book with a gold edge. Do not open the book. If I had to guess the book won’t be in the box. It has a will of its own. I wish I could have told you all this in person, but life doesn’t seem to be working out that way. All I can say is thank you.”
Dale opened the box and read the title of the first comic, “Tales of the Scarlet Knight.” He opened the book and saw a comic drawing of Bill walking along the river then he saw himself as a comic character. He looked through the books as Bill became the Knight then battled the Gold while sleeping with her in the real world. The last book showed the train and the death of Tina then Bill’s death. None of it made any sense. The final page was of him reading the book on his front porch. The artist had every detail down including the coffee he spilled on the seat next to him as he opened the box. Dale searched the box, but the book was not there. He said, “the book has a will of its own. The book with no name.” After taking a few days to decide what to do, Dale took the books to a local independent publisher and asked what they thought. A month later the first book was in the stands. By the fourth book, they were shopping around for someone to write the next part. Dale donated the profits to a local drug rehab clinic in Bill’s name. When the final book in the first run was published, Dale passed away from heart complications. His last act before his death was to travel back to Ohio and have a headstone placed on Bill’s grave. Under his name was, “here lies the Scarlet Knight.”
Epilogue

Bill woke up in a grassy field near a set of snow-capped mountains. He was still warm, but the pain was gone. This place seemed familiar. He looked around trying to see where he was when a voice he knew said, “I was starting to wonder if you were ever going to wake up.” Bill turned and saw Tina. His heart lifted then dropped. Tina smiled and ran over embracing him. Bill asked, “how can you…… after what I did?” Tina kissed him on the lips. She said, “for you, it’s been only a day or two, but for us, it's been more than a year.” Bill pulled her close and said, “I gave up and was willing to just let it all end.” Tina said, “yes I know, but none of that matters now.” Bill asked, “we?” Tina kissed him again and said, “soon, but first I think you need to see what I saw so you can understand why this place is…… well it’s heaven.” She took him by the hand and led him to a small pond. A woman was there with a girl about their age. Cathern said, “Hello Bill it’s nice to finally meet you. I’ve been watching you for a while now.” Bill replied, “Ok, that’s not creepy… no not at all.” Kaylee laughed. She said, “my name is Kaylee and like you I once held the book. Before Tina, I was the Gold Knight and the founder of the city.”
Bill sat on his couch in front of his aging flat screen drinking straight from the bottle of whiskey trying to ignore the pain in his chest and arms. He was forty-seven years old and ninety pounds overweight. He just lost what would be his last job and was handed an eviction notice from the one room efficiency in East Cleveland. He spent the last nearly thirty years slowly dying but today was the day he finished the job. He knew he was having a heart attack, but he also knew he couldn’t afford to survive. The many attempts to reform healthcare made the process too expensive to live. Bill looked away from the water and asked, “I don’t understand how can that be me?” Kaylee said, “this was your fate before the book. You were going nowhere in a hurry to give up.” Kaylee waved her hand over the water, and the image changed to a twenty-something Tina as a man first slapped her then he pushed her down raping her as he punched her in the face over and over. Kaylee said, “Tina was going to marry badly and have her life ended on a garage floor at the hands of her husband.” Bill looked to Tina who had turned her head away from the pond. He asked, “where are we?”

The fire raced across the valley from the mountains past the lake and the ruins of the castle and city. The flames caught up with the tan knight, and he was set on fire with his armor sliding off his body
taking the skin with the melting slag. Hector dropped his black armor and ran for his life. He had died in flames many years ago, and he had no intention on reliving that feeling. He made it to the ancient city and walked into the courtyard. He turned and saw the flames crest the hill changing the land from a forest to almost a desert of ash, but not all were burned. Ricky joined him at the entrance, and like Hector, he wasn’t in the red armor with the white trim. He had on blue jeans with a white shirt underneath a red vest with white trim. He also had a gun in a holster on his hip. Hector saw he was now in black slacks with a collarless white shirt, gray vest under a black jacket. He also had two dark revolvers on his hips. As they looked out into the woods, the unburned trees turned into another variety of tree while others became a sort of brush and a few became cacti. The walls turned to adobe with an iron and wood gate. He turned around following the changes as the ancient Roman city became something close to an adobe mission from Hector’s time. The people’s simple togas and dresses became a mix of white and colored cotton. The purple knight came out in a brown pair of slacks a white shirt and a white Stetson hat with a purple ribbon. Ricky said, “I guess the times they are a changing.”

Tina led Bill down a path past a pair of twin teenage girls. Off in the distance, there was a cabin that
was dramatically oversized. On the porch were a very tall man and woman. Tina waved to them, and they waved back. She said, “that’s Cain and Delia. They helped me build the house and make that first couple of months better.” Around a hill and past some trees they came across a small cabin and a woman sitting on the porch with a small child. Bill stopped and looked at the woman. It was his sister Brenda. The baby was maybe three months old. Bill walked up to Brenda and did his best to hug her without touching the child. The baby was a little girl with sandy blonde hair and emerald green eyes. Tina walked up behind then past Bill and over to the baby. Bill looked into her eyes and saw something he couldn’t understand. Tina said, “this is Wilhelmina, but we call her Billie for her father.” Bill looked at Brenda who shook her head. Tina said, “I was nearly a month into the pregnancy when I came here. I had our daughter with the help of Brenda and Delia.” Bill looked back into the eyes of his daughter, as she smiled.

Frank sat in a van on his way to the courthouse and his arraignment for drug charges and what some were calling possible terrorist actions. All his children were dead along with his wife and his brother. He felt like the last cookie in the pack. The one everyone forgot about and let go stale. Even if somehow, he beats the charges the government took all the money,
and the company that held the lease for his business used his arrest to break the lease and keep the money. All he had was the house and his car, and that would soon go when he was convicted and sent to jail for the rest of his life. The van arrived at a mob scene with people holding signs saying, “kill dealers,” and “drugs kill.” The police and sheriff’s departments pushed the crowds back as they helped Frank into the building. Inside, he met with his lawyer who didn’t say a word to him. Frank figured this meant he wasn’t going to represent him. His lawyer went into a courtroom without him, and Frank sat down and waited for his last day to start.

An hour later his lawyer came out and ordered Frank’s cuffs removed. He said, “all charges are dismissed, and you are free to go.” Frank looked at the courtroom door then back to his lawyer and asked, “what?” His lawyer put out his hand and said, “Hi, my name is Sam Hagan. I am your lawyer. The police illegally entered your house. No warrant, and because of that any connection you had to your son’s business was ruled inadmissible in court.” Hagan put out his hand, but Frank didn’t take it. Instead, he asked, “so now what do I do?” Hagan put his hand down and said, “whatever you want. I mean the money is gone, and I don’t think the feds will give it to you with the whole drug connection, and your house is trashed.” Frank
backed up and asked, “what about my house?” Hagan said, “call your insurance company, and I am sure they can help.” Frank looked down and said, “I couldn’t afford to pay that insurance.” Hagan tried not to smile. He said, “well there’s nothing that can’t be fixed.” Hagan backed away and said, “well, my part in all this is over unless you want to hire and pay me.” Frank looked at him.

The house was dark, but Frank could see the broken windows, missing door and spray paint on the outside of the house. Inside the house was trashed with spray paint on the walls and every single piece of furniture broken. The stove, refrigerator, and microwave were all gone. The fixtures in the bathroom were all broken with the smell of stale urine in the air. Back in the living room, he found a picture of him and his family in front of his failed business. Thinking about it he remembered he still owned the building. Then he thought about his car. He went into the bedroom he shared with Nancy and over to the bed. The sheets were gone, and the mattress was covered in dark stains. He pulled a false heat vent out of the floor next to the bed and opened a lockbox. Inside was his mother’s wedding ring, around ten-thousand in cash a few gold coins and a gun that belonged to his father. He racked the slide on the old forty-five-caliber 1911
Frank kicked the door and nothing. All the doors were nailed shut. He checked the windows, but someone painted them over. He knew that a board in the back was loose and if he worked at it he could pry it off and slip in. After prying the board free, he got inside and found his car was untouched. In the trunk was about sixty-five thousand dollars. Some cash he set aside as a just in case of an emergency fund. He planned to sleep in the car then free it from the garage and leave Ohio for good. He got in the back and went to sleep until he heard a sound. A thump, thump, thump on one of the windows. Then there was a voice, “you should have left when you could ass hole.” Frank got up and out of the car with the gun. He was ready for a fight. This was his property, and no one was going to move him. Another voice said, “give us the money, and we might let you live.” Instead of answering, Frank went over and tried to kick out the door. On the seventh kick, the door fell, and he stepped out. Somewhere between the words “don’t” and “move” the police that were called after someone saw an armed man breaking into the garage shot Frank. The gunfire wasn’t initially fatal, but Frank fell back, and a nail penetrated the base of his skull. In his last
moments, he saw a little man in a white suit on the roof of the garage laughing at him and waving.

Bill stepped out of their house and looked out onto what was going to be another good day. Off in the distance, he could see Billie playing with a small group of children. It had been five years since he arrived, and many things had changed. Vot had sent many people to the valley including families with young children. Vot himself stayed true to his word and stayed away. He had said, “while people have a natural temptation, when I am around it is amped up until even good people do wrong. If this place is going to be a fresh start for Cain, then I have to stay away.” Vot had said that they would grow old and eventually die just like if this was their world and that they would face the same consequences for their actions. He said, “so just live a good life and love as much and as many as you can and leave it all on the field.” Vot told him he had souls to torment then he was gone for good. Tina was in the kitchen with their two-year-old son Chris and the four-month-old Sally. Chris ran over to his father and hugged his leg. He looked up and asked, “fishing?” Bill looked over at Tina who was smiling and shaking her head. Bill went to his knees, so he could be at his son’s height and said, “not today son. Today is something special. Today we go and see the dragons.” Chris turned to Tina and asked, “do we have to take
“Stinky?” Tina cocked her head at Bill. “Chris don’t call your sister that,” Bill said with more than just a little smile. Tina said, “call Super Billie in so we can get ready for the walk.” Bill walked back out of the house and saw his daughter in her scarlet cape and her alter ego as Super Billie. He said to himself, “A hero's work is never done.”

The family walked down the path passing other families until they came up to a small house near a river. Billie kicked open a gate and ran to Brenda screaming, “Super Billie.” From behind Brenda came her three-year-old daughter Marina Sirtis and her husband. Marina said, “And her sidekick The Mighty Mari.” The two girls met in the middle of the yard and did their usual greeting. They locked hands and started to spin around. About four years ago Terence sat in his club with a dancer giving him a lap dance trying desperately to remember her name. He tried to put Brenda out of his mind, but nothing helped. The woman got up and left, but he didn’t even realize she was gone. The curtain to the booth where he was moved slightly, and a small man in a white suit walked in. Terence looked at his glass then back to the man. He said, “Great now my employees are drugging me.” Vot said, “I’m no drug or hallucination. I’m here to make you an offer.” Terence just sat and stared at him. Vot walked over and gave Terence a small box. Inside
was a black pill. Vot said, “take the pill, and you will see her again or don’t and live your life without her.” Terence looked at the pill and just for a second, he heard Brenda saying, “take it and be with me.”

Down in the open field with a view of the mountains the small village met and celebrated their founding as well as the up incoming event. Every year on this date the two dragons that lived in the mountain came out and danced in the sky. The dance started at dusk and went until the sky was black. None of them knew why the dragons did this. It had been years since one of them spoke to any humans. Daichi Asai a one-time samurai and de facto mayor sat with his wife and twin daughters. Cain and Delia were there and were popular with all the kids. They couldn’t have their own children, but they acted like everyone in the village were their children. Brenda looked over the crowd hoping to see another family member, but no one else would ever show up. Bill spread a blanket on the grass and both he and Tina sat down with the kids all around them. They would come to this event every year with their children than their grandchildren as the village grew. When Bill died at the age of eighty-five, he was buried at the base of the mountain. Tina joined him a few years later, and they both moved on to the big whatever that is next in the cycle of life. Bill and Tina’s names were carved into the mountain next to
the names of his sister Brenda, her husband Terence, Daichi Asai and all those that passed.

A man sat in a parked car watching a woman in a house. Dean Caster sat here every night watching this woman. She was his object of affection, and he was her stalker. The news was still talking about the events in Ohio and the new story about the accidental death of Frank Martin. It had been two days since his death, but the news media couldn’t get enough. He turned off the radio so he wouldn’t draw any attention. Alice Becker was his, and no one was going to keep them apart. All he had to do was introduce himself and let her know how much he loves her. He knew that this time it would be different. The others didn’t understand him, so they had to die. His love was just too much for them to handle. That day he followed her into a bookstore as she shopped for a gift. A man came over to him with a red book with a gold edge. He told him that the book would help him get everything he deserved. The man then gave him the book and said, “don’t open the book until you’re alone.” Dean sat in his car with the book and watched the girl. From the top of a telephone pole overlooking Dean’s car, Vot smiled and said, “Time to get back to work.”