

KILL SIX

By

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Cover by Dusan Arsenic

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Kill Six

Chapter 1

It wouldn't seem to stop. There had been a cold mist for the last two days. The clouds would get heavier from time to time, the mist turning into rain and then back again. There was a wind with it too, out of the northwest. Leaves that should have hung on for another week or two giving up the fight early, covering the yards and making the sidewalks slippery. And snow. Big flakes mixed in with the rain, disappearing as soon as they hit the ground, but letting everyone know the long winter would likely be longer this year.

Ken Bishop sat inside his car, the windows fogged over, watching the moisture on his windshield gather enough mass to roll down the glass. He'd been running his motor off and on for the last fifteen minutes trying to keep warm, but it didn't seem to help. The damp chill slithering into his jacket and shoes. His feet were cold, and he wiggled his toes trying to generate some warmth. He looked at his watch. Fifteen minutes since they went by. Time to go.

Bishop got out of this car, locked it, and then pulled up the hood on his jacket. He wore a ball cap under his hood, not because of habit like many of the men he knew, he just wanted to keep the rain out of his eyes. And not be recognized. Truth was, he rarely wore a cap of any type, even in winter. He was proud of having a full head of blonde hair in his fifties, and particular about it too. Didn't like what it looked like after wearing a cap.

The area was mostly residential. A small office building, a storage facility, and a larger nursing home for women within two blocks of his location. It was a hilly landscape. Yards sloped down to the street; the street itself undulating. He looked up the hill over the hood of his car at the storage building. There was a light on in the building, at the entrance, but he had seen no one and assumed the building was empty. The buildings and homes across the street were dark.

He hurried to the sidewalk, taking it to the crest of the hill, hands in his pockets, head down. The mist still crept in under his hood. Stopping at the top of the hill, he glanced across the street at the houses, lights on in both, but the curtains were drawn. There was a streetlamp across the street too, but it couldn't reach beyond the trees lining the street next to the sidewalk. He didn't think he'd be seen. Looked down the hill, rain now hitting his glasses. Ducked his head again and started jogging.

As he reached the third driveway crossing the sidewalk, Bishop stopped and looked up the driveway, just to confirm he was at the right place. Not that he needed to do that. He'd been here many times before. But in his nervousness, he felt compelled to check, thinking maybe he should turn around and go back, before taking a deep breath and making his way up the driveway. The driveway ran alongside the brick-sided building to the parking lot in the rear. The lot was lit by lights on short black poles along the perimeter and a light above the entrance to the building. Bishop stopped by the dumpster at the entrance to the lot and counted six vehicles. Panic gripped him for an instant as he didn't see the red Highlander that had passed him fifteen minutes earlier on the street, but then saw it parked next to the entrance.

They were still inside, his niece and nephew. James and Janet Maples, twins, now in their late twenties. Good kids. James in administration for a company in Superior, his sister a librarian in Duluth, taking classes at UMD and trying to earn her master's. Both

were single, neither with a steady. They tried to visit their mother, Laura, at least twice a week, often on their own, but making a practice of going together on Tuesday evenings. They'd met for pizza tonight before driving to the nursing home together.

They had diagnosed Laura Maples with Alzheimer's just over a year ago. Her husband, Bob, had noticed the change in his wife, putting it off to her being the busy person she was. But when she had become lost trying to find her way home from the grocery store, he insisted she see a doctor. The disease had advanced rapidly. Laura had to quit her job and outside activities, staying home initially, but Bob had been forced to move her to a home for constant care. She rarely recognized him now, or her children, and was mostly bedridden. They had given her weeks to live.

But that was too long for Ken Bishop. He needed his sister dead. Their mother had passed away only a month before after a long illness. Bishop was the executor of the estate. In the last week he had gone through his mother's assets, totaling up the amount that would come to her six children. His mother's estate was to be divided evenly between all of her living children at the time the proceeds were distributed. For Ken Bishop, this would not be enough.

Bishop was a gambler. He used to do pull-tabs at the VFW and an occasional lottery ticket. Won a few small pots and one of his buddies talked him into going to the casino. Cheap drinks and a chance to win a lot more. Bishop stuck with slots and black-jack at first, but then got into craps, and finally, poker. Put a second mortgage on his home without his wife's knowledge and ran their savings down to nothing. Cost him his marriage and now, unless he could come up with the money in the next month, he'd be on the street.

Bishop told himself he'd be doing everyone a favor. He and his remaining siblings would get his sister's share of their mother's estate, Laura and Laura's family would be spared more suffering and the expense of the care. A win-win for everyone.

He was cold now, shivering, hugging himself. Not sure if it was the weather or his nerves. The blowing mist covered his glasses, and he pulled them off, wiping the lenses with a tissue. They were smeared but better. Pulled his cap low to keep more of the moisture off. Bishop was pacing now, trying to stay warm, thinking he should go back to the car and try another time when the door opened. He ducked behind the dumpster and watched his niece and nephew hustle across the lot to the Highlander. The vehicle backed out of its space and then turned towards the driveway, its headlights flashing across the dumpster before it drove past, turning left when it reached the street.

Bishop ran across the driveway and around the back of the building, the side facing the street. The area had been allowed to grow wild, a mixture of pine and ash and birch standing over the brush below. There was a door on this side of the building with a small cement pad outside, a birdfeeder there that the nurses would stock. Inside the door was a small sitting area, a couple of upholstered chairs and a couch where the residents could be taken to sit with their visitors. Two large windows overlooked the yard and the bird feeder.

Laura's room was directly across from the door on the lower level, the last room at that end of the building. The nurses would occasionally place her in a wheelchair and position her in front of the window facing the birdfeeder during the day. It would seem to entertain her for a while, but then she would grow tired and fall asleep and was wheeled back into her room. But now it was past seven. Laura would be in bed.

Bishop was concerned about a few things. It was possible that someone would be up and in the sitting room, something he could see now was not the case as he skirted the back of the building. The room was empty. His second concern was that the door would be locked. He had taped it open during his visit with his sister this morning. Slipped a piece of tape over the strike plate after he borrowed a key from a nurse, telling the nurse he was going to fill the bird feeder. Mentioned he had filled the feeder to the head nurse on his way out, but it was still possible that the tape had been discovered. After stepping up to the door, Bishop slowly pulled on the handle. The door opened quietly.

His third concern was that the nursing staff would interrupt or see him. He decided this would only be an issue if he was seen leaving his sister's room after he had killed her. If anyone spotted him beforehand, he could easily provide an excuse for being there.

Bishop removed his shoes before stepping inside, leaving them just outside the door under the overhang. They may get a little rain in them but he didn't expect to be very long. He stepped inside, holding the door with his gloved hand so it would close silently. Looking down the hall, he found it empty and hurried across to his sister's closed door. As he reached for the handle he realized a nurse may be inside with her, thought about his excuse for entering and opened the door.

Laura Maples looked as if she was asleep. This surprised Bishop a bit as her children had only left a few minutes before, but he guessed she likely had fallen asleep before they left. This was good. The twins would have said something to the nurse on the way out. The nurse would be in no hurry to check on Laura.

She was on her back. Bishop could make out her short breaths as he stood over her with the pillow from the chair next to her bed. She seemed so at peace. And she looked so small. He gazed at her thinking of childhood games and family dinners and vacations and felt himself doubting what he was going to do. What he had to do. For everyone's good. Bishop leaned over his sister, placed the pillow over her head, and her eyes shot open.

"Ken?"

My God, she recognized me. "Sorry."

He pushed the pillow down on her face and held it tight for what seemed like forever. He thought she was incapacitated, but she struggled, her legs writhing, her arms trying to grab him. Sweating and breathing hard, thinking he could hear noises in the hall, Bishop held tight until all sign of movement was ended, and then for a while longer. He lifted the pillow and looked into the lifeless eyes of his sister before putting the pillow back on the chair and hurrying out the way he had entered.

