



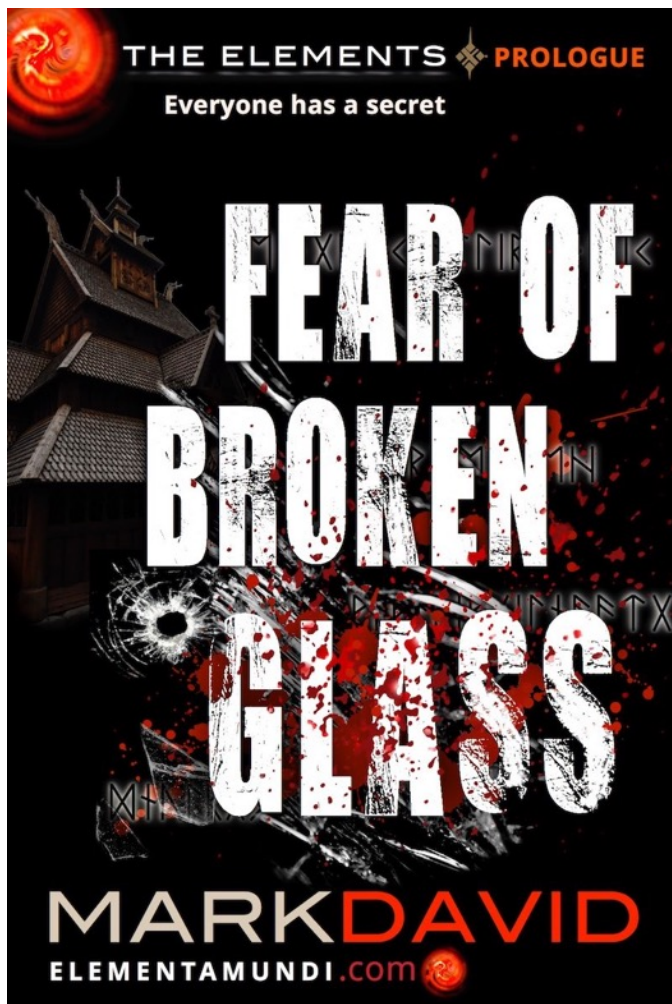
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EPIC FICTION

7 elements
7 deceptions
7 revelations

elementamundi.com

THE ELEMENTS



Fear Of Broken Glass by Mark David

The Prologue to The Elements, epic fiction set near the end of the cold way

Fear of Broken Glass is a crime, a mystery and a thriller: A notorious wilderness with a macabre past. A reconstructed Viking church by the shore of lake known for past pagan crimes. And a painting, a lost masterpiece framed in runic inscriptions without an owner.

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Introduction to The Elements

7 elements. 7 deceptions. 7 revelations: There is no other project quite like *The Elements*, the result of many years of dedicated research and development.

This first book – the Prologue – is the story I began ten years ago. I started researching in 2006, wanting to combine the esoteric feel of *The Da Vinci Code* with the gritty realism of *Scandinavian Noir* (or 'Nordic Noir') we know from books such as Stieg Larsson's Millennium trilogy and *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo*. Add to that interest in 'the strands of people's fates through time', a dose of Nordic mythology wrapped within a secret code, a conspiracy gradually revealed – and *The Elements* as a series was born. Since 2007, I've expanded the story to encompass many different threads, characters and timelines, bound together by the reader's process of discovery.

The result is a series starting from humble beginnings, growing into a multi-layered epic. This prologue is that humble beginning, starting with a crime, opening into a labyrinthine mystery tour that's often kept me up late at night constructing it. So in the infamous words of J.R.R. Tolkien, 'the tale grew in the telling' – now encompassing at least twelve books being planned for publication and serialization 2017-2022.

Synopsis

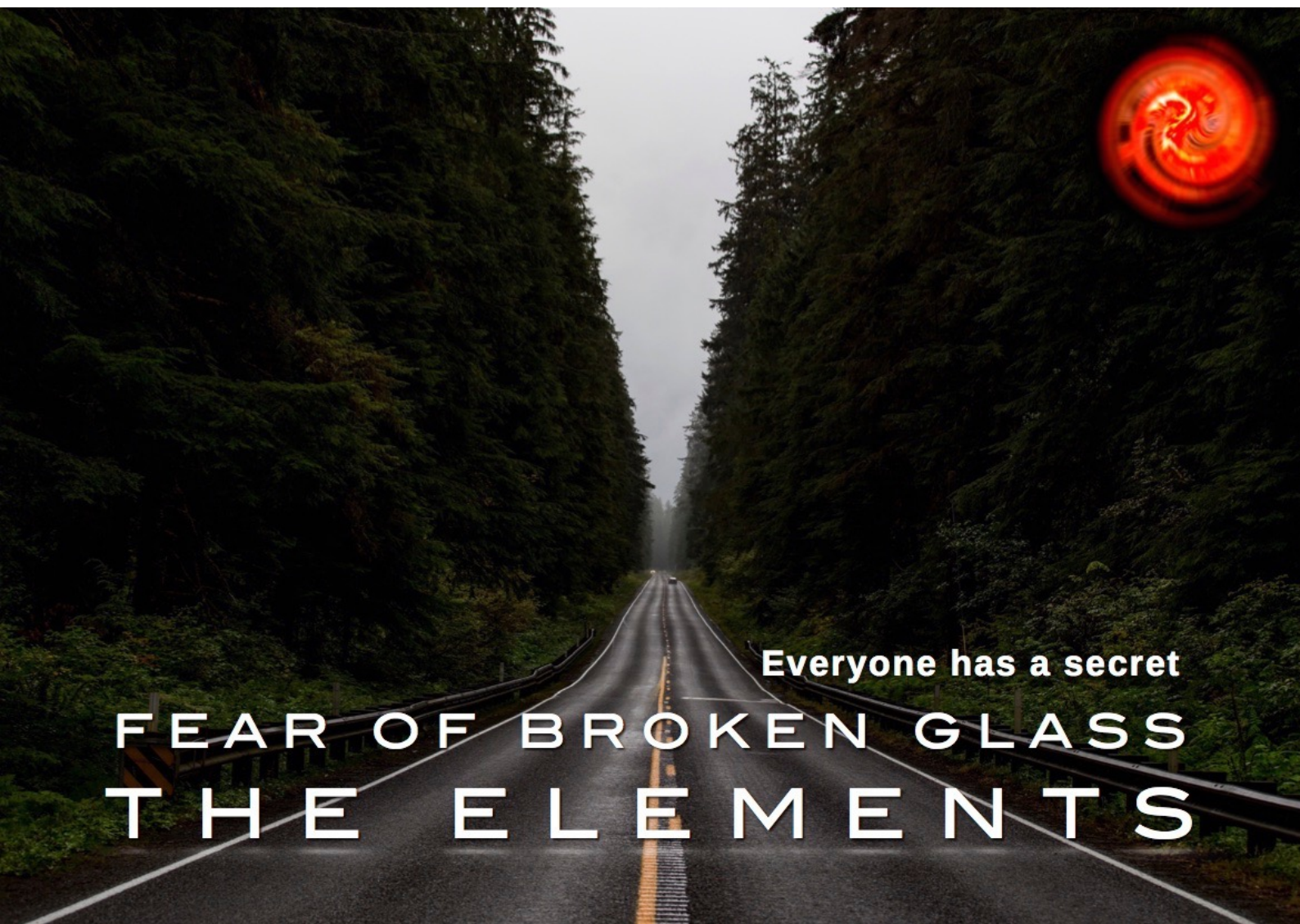
Everyone has a secret: The beginning of The Elements epic opens amidst the dark forests of Sweden, where no one really is, who they say they are.

Something strange has been going on at for a very, very long time...

Ten years in the making, the prologue to the epic Elements series involves a notorious wilderness with a macabre past; a reconstructed Viking church by the shore of a Swedish lake. And a painting, a lost masterpiece framed in runic inscriptions without an owner – all connected with a crime that was never meant to be solved and a shadowy figure from the past – archaeologist Karl Oskar Eklund.

When Hasse Almquist, a detective with a tarnished reputation is brought in to investigate a murder at an ancient site of pagan worship, Troll Church Hill, little can he know nothing is at it seems. The site of a macabre crime where Danish art gallery owner Thomas Denisen has been discovered dead, his eyes removed and nails hammered through his feet, the hallowed pagan ground in the middle of the Swedish Tiveden National Park draws troublesome connections to a remote and disturbing past.

The detective begins his investigation by linking the apparently ritual killing to four unsolved serial murders from the 1970's. His enquiries take him to the remote Gotfrid's Homestead, temporary home to the remaining members of the group



Everyone has a secret
FEAR OF BROKEN GLASS
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visiting from Copenhagen the deceased victim had been a part of. Each of them guard a hidden secret involving the painting found in the back of the victim's car – and the reasons for their involvement. This complicates his investigation and weakens his chances of solving the crime and how it is related to the unsolved murders of the past.

Attempting to piece together a complex and fragmented picture linking motives to murders involving pagan practices, Almquist takes the decision to isolate the suspects from the outside world. Thus is the stage set for a journey into the past, catalyzing a sequence of events with consequences for revealing the identity of the killer and the crimes of the past. The detective will accept too late, that he has himself been a contributing factor to the murder, opening Pandora's Box and all that lies within. With deadly forces already in motion, the investigators and suspects alike will both become a part of each others fate, unwilling participants in a greater and much darker universe than the one they thought they inhabited.

Sample Chapter Preview

Chapter 1: A Past United

*Sacrifice is offered to the spirits,
everyone is sprinkled with the blood.
The best part is gifted to the spirits,
what remains is to be consumed by men...*

Trollkyrka Rites

13th October 1987 18:30

The air was heavy, sky darkening, the smell of rain pervasive despite the absence of raindrops. A black coupé was parked close to the edge of the forest, three hours walk from the rock called *Troll's Church*, doors open. Mud-spattered alloy wheels greeted the visitors with the four-quadrant symbol of what had once been a utilitarian propeller, now

synonymous with luxury, rain-studded windows illuminated from within by a light moving in the vicinity of the rear seat.

What had started as the execution of a routine duty had become a search for a killer. The victim's car had been discovered in the west visitor's car park. Two detectives worked rhythmically and routinely, searching with precision, despite being confined to cramped working conditions.

'Whoever parked here was in a hurry,' the first of the detectives said, the taller and bulkier of the two. He was leaning half-in, half-out of the car and paused for a moment, gazing past the driver's door to the missing lining panel. It lay discarded on the passenger seat, dark cavities revealed and already forgotten.

His leaner, quicker companion with the flashlight turned to look at him. The second detective was the senior officer called Lindgren. He sat on the back seat, white rubber-gloved hands poised. He looked out at the dark edge of the tree line beyond the vehicle, to where a path marker provided entry to the unseen park and nodded.

The first detective retreated, sliding the driver's seat into the down-forward position, so he could climb in to the back seat and sit down next to his companion who had his back to him. 'I heard they passed the case to Almquist.'

Lindgren didn't respond, concentrating on the task of inserting the flat edge of a knife blade underneath the fake leather lining of the side panel.

'Some say he hasn't got it in him,' the first detective continued, turning his attention to the back lining behind the driver's seat. 'He's getting a bit long in the tooth for this kind of thing if you ask me.' He fumbled a hand into his pocket for his own knife, his breath vaporizing in the cold night air. 'Should have quit when he was ahead.'

'That's the problem though isn't it?' Lindgren said quietly, turning around. He moved the light down to the seat, the light above his head lighting brown hair blonde. 'He's never been ahead, has he?'

'Ah, that's not true,' the first detective moved his gloved hand along the edges of the lining, feeling with his fingers.

Occasional raindrops hit the metal roof above them as Lindgren returned to his task and pulled the liner, knife in hand. ‘Four times.’ He wrapped his white fingers around the edge and pulled. ‘Each one bad luck?’ He snorted as the panel came away with a series of popping sounds, the remaining plastic plugs pulled from their sockets. He directed a thin aluminum pen flashlight into the shadows of another cavity. ‘Some people are just born that way.’

‘Anyone can have bad luck.’

‘No. Mark my words,’ Lindgren said slowly, eyes scanning each crevice. ‘He won’t get anywhere.’ He sat there staring into the cavity for a moment before shaking his head.

The first detective grunted as he heaved, turning his back on Lindgren to look inside without seeing anything. ‘Then he could do with all the help he can get.’

Lindgren shook his head, turning around with the flash light in his hand. ‘Help? In most cases, cases like this... it’s like walking a path littered with rubble in the dark. It can be right there, in front of us.’ He waved the light on the seat, then moved it upward so it blinded his companion. ‘All we need is a little light.’ He moved the light away and smiled as he placed a hand in his pocket, taking out a piece of gum and popping it into his mouth, ‘All we have to do is follow it, picking up as we go along. But not Almquist...’

‘Cos he’s not up to it?’

‘Nah. He hasn’t got a light,’ he said raising his head. ‘Does he?’

‘He’s got Vikland.’

Lindgren smirked, turning the flashlight so it shone inside the back seat cavity. ‘What was the last murder case you can remember she worked on?’

‘She had a few in Stockholm.’

The droplets became random, quickening in the silence.

Lindgren shook his head, leaning closer, moving the light downwards. He shone it to one side, then the other as he chewed. ‘But this –’ he sat upright with a smug look, ‘well, with what we have here, we can’t follow that path, light or no light.’

The first detective frowned. He turned and waited.

Lindgren read his look, eyes never leaving the cavity, breath filling the light. 'This isn't Stockholm,' he said softly, reaching a hand inside. He closed his fingers around a package wrapped in black plastic sealed with silver duct tape. He returned the pen light to the seat and using both hands removed it from its hiding place as he chewed.

'What is it?' The first detective leaned forwards, face intense.

'You might not be around long enough to see the end of this.'

'Why do you say that?'

'Just take my word for it...' Lindgren smirked, face lit from below. 'It's not something you want to know about.'

The first detective looked at his superior, eyes shining and stayed looking at him for a long time but refrained from asking the unasked questions.

'I tell you what,' Lindgren said quietly, the droplets intensifying to rain. He turned off the flashlight and sat upright looking thoughtful. 'For now, we're going to sit back. Let him do the driving.' He looked down at the dark package in his hands for a moment. 'Just follow at a healthy distance, see what he picks up on the gloomy path ahead. Because wherever this leads,' he chewed and felt the package with one hand as if confirming something he already knew. He dropped his voice turning his light to shine in his companion's face. 'No amount of light is going to make the blindest bit of difference to anyone, least of all Almquist.'

It had started again. Somewhere within this bleached landscape blurred by the worsening weather was Æsahult church. Somewhere amongst the crowns of conifers, rising, stretching uniform for as far as the eye could see; somewhere amongst an even cloth of green turned gray in a blanket of regret. He searched for the tell-tale tiered roof, rotor blades beating in the pit of his stomach but looked in vain, finding nothing.

The forest thinned, revealing the first houses and homesteads of *Lindhult*, passing a drab patchwork of lifeless plantations and meagre agricultural pastures towards more

forest. Then he saw it, to the side, the spire and clustered form of Æsahult church. It appeared out of the mist and was gone, soon passing across the dull, lifeless waters of the lake called *Unden* as dark and gray as the sky, approaching the eastern shore and the open strip that was the village of *Tived* and the East Lake Road. Watching over swathes of muted grassed meadow as the helicopter banked southeast towards denser forest, to where the land seemed like a deep-pile rug, worn in places to a threadbare carpet, exposed to the underlying bedrock. Here and there single boulders rose as large as houses, tall and proud. The rise and fall of hills of stone. Other lakes smaller, darker, black holes in dark minds, relieved by the dark-green of fir trees blending with the lighter green of pine, those smaller, more forlorn trees with trunks and branches almost as bent and twisted as his own thoughts.

There had been four murders.

He raised his hand and rubbed his beard, watching the pilot lean to his side as he looked down, scanning the park, the helicopter's nose lifting as it slowed, descending, whipping the rain-laden air.

The last one had been in '79.

But why now? He looked down to two officers looking up, searching for Elin and felt some sense of relief in having her here, grateful he had avoided the long walk. Where it had taken them minutes, his colleagues had used hours on foot; unable to bring with them more than they could carry, they had walked the breadth of the Tiveden National Park. Not Sweden's largest, by any stretch of the imagination, but certainly it's most rugged and inhospitable.

He looked over to the pilot, pointing downwards. The pilot moved the control, the helicopter whining, banking, turning towards open ground.

It wasn't over.

Almquist placed a hand inside his jacket, finding his A5 notebook. He flipped a page, one name standing out from all the others and looked out of the cabin. It wasn't the place that chilled him, or its history, having witnessed more blood than most

would ever know. No, it was the name. With the sixth sense that tells any detective he was walking into a trap, he resolutely prepared himself for the worst.

Eklund.

Light rain pattering his shoulders, Hasse Almquist removed the box of matches from the depths of a heavy gray coat, removing a match, glancing below him, his police cap sheltering it from the rain. He held it firmly yet delicately between thumb and forefinger and applied pressure, forcing his fingers backwards. The bulbous head of chlorate caught against the binder of powdered glass and red phosphorous striking, igniting, erupting into a small fireball. He cupped his hands around the flame and let it take until the splint burned evenly, drawing it towards the end of the cigarette hanging from pale, uneven lips. He sucked, igniting the tobacco bright orange and took two pulls, raising his bearded face to the darkening sky, letting out the smoke, relishing its familiar calming sensation. He lowered his head, the sound of a light rain upon peaked cap, experienced eyes below sagging eyelids scanning the scrub below. He turned towards a long steep flight of wooden steps; a crude affair made for the sole purpose of providing hikers access to the summit. One continuous flight of thirty-one steps, wet and slippery, lethal for those without the right footwear. But that wasn't why the man was dead, he knew that already.

Cigarette in mouth, Almquist removed his rain-dusted glasses, placing them in his top coat pocket and took hold of the pair of black rubber binoculars hanging around his neck, raising them to his eyes. He turned the ribbed dial so an image shifted into focus, taking form out of the blurred shades of sodden earth. The corpse had the look of the damned, he thought, laying in a heap in a puddle of muddy water. One leg was folded impossibly under the other, bent upwards at the knee, shards of jagged white bone showing pink where it emerged from sodden faded blue jeans.

‘His spine probably snapped before he hit the ground. Leg, back and skull are shattered.’

Almquist nodded at the woman's voice as he panned slowly to the right, away from the twisted upper torso towards the rock and scrub. He stopped at a solitary boot. It was caked in mud.

‘He didn’t have a chance.’

He moved the binoculars back towards the body again, down to the head and could see why, stopping at the mess of the poor man's face. The side of his jaw hung at a lopsided angle as if in a last, impossible scream. Then downwards, to once fine white feet without their shoes. Smooth; unused to walking, filthy and soiled in a way only Almquist really understood, despite the rain.

Elin Vikland was dressed in blue service clothes; red-brown shoulder length hair flicked out at the sides and a surprising amount of jewelry. A large silver-looking ring on her wet finger with a smooth stone in the centre and five or six bracelets of silver around her wrist; a small hunting knife in a polished black leather scabbard at her side. He reminded himself to have a word with her about that.

She sighed. ‘I’m sorry Hasse. They are making it our case, even though the body lies inside *Skaraborg* County. They insisted.’

Insisted? They had never insisted before. Insisting was enough to dampen the mood of anyone on his team. He was going to be busy before he could get home to the football and a TV dinner followed by a malt.

Cursing silently, Almquist watched his staff processing the scene, going about their jobs, words few and actions many. He lowered his binoculars and held his cigarette for a moment just taking it all in. He took another long pull, raising his head, blowing the blue-gray smoke into a miserable dark-gray October sky. With a sigh, shoulders sagging, he flicked his rain-damp cigarette butt to the ground. He didn’t have a choice, he knew that. He had thought it was all over. And now, he was cornered. If he said no, it could mean a premature redundancy without a pension. The murder was one thing, the reason why they had gone out of their way to make it his case something else. Reluctantly, he

turned away, knowing he was being used like a doormat, something upon which could be wiped someone else's shit. After all, *they had gone out of their way to make it his case.*

'Has anyone touched the body?'

Six-inch carpenters nails penetrated bare feet congealed with blood. The Forensics Officer had her back to him. She wore a loose rain poncho and rain hat. Looking at those feet, he felt a sense of relief when she shook her head.

'I have a boot-print.'

'Hiker?'

She shrugged, pointing to a patch of moist ground not far from the body. 'One, maybe two good ones. Too many pine needles for more.'

'Make a cast.' As if she needed telling. 'Keep looking.'

They were five. Five was good for a case like this; close knit, yet enough minds to cover the information and angles. Elin Vikland walked over. She held a clear plastic bag studded with rain drops.

'Thomas Denisen. Danish. Thirty-eight; here, we found this.' She passed him a wallet inside the forensics bag. 'Died from loss of blood or a broken neck, take your pick; dead less than twenty-four hours.'

Always effective, Elin was. Almquist nodded his appreciation as he placed it inside his top pocket, reaching behind him to remove a pair of white rubber surgical gloves from his back pocket, shaking them to life. 'Anything worth asking about?'

She was slightly taller than average. Fit, dressed in the same police cap as his own, thick blue jacket and trousers of winter police issue. She replaced the bag inside her jacket pocket. 'Apart from ID? Handwritten instructions, in Danish, some place called Gotfridsgaarden.'

Gotfridsgaarden? 'Anything else?'

‘Only the wallet.’ She tried to smile. ‘We left the rest for you.’

With a false look of gratitude, Almquist pulled the surgical rubber gloves over well-padded freckled fingers, back and forth, one after the other, letting go with a short, sharp snap. Kneeling down, he ran his rubber-coated hands over the cold wet clothing, like a security check at the airport. He placed a hand carefully inside the first pocket of the victim’s windbreaker, then the other. He examined his trouser pockets, then turned to look at Vikland as Second Officer Lindgren shook his head in the background, talking animatedly with the Forensics Officer.

Elin Vikland was standing as patiently as she always stood, listening as only she could listen, neither agreeing or disagreeing. That was her way and that was why he liked working with her.

He turned his back to the body, walking to join the other members of his team stopping, listening briefly, then turning once again to look at it from the other side. Squatting down, breathing in deeply, he rested his forearms across bent thighs, his peaked cap keeping the worst of the rain off his glasses.

Sagging bags under weary eyes made him look like a bloodhound. It was with a sense of tracking the unseen, that he took in the formless remains. It made him feel so shamefully nauseous, fighting the urge to retch as he moved his focus upwards, to the drying congealed mess of hollow eye sockets. Then finally, he took the courage to study the details that had made it his case.

What kind of person could do this to another?, he wondered, feeling now the familiar nauseous pull deep in the pit of his stomach. The eyes had been crudely removed, yet carefully. The remains discarded and formless, left on the ground at the side of his head, worthless. He raised a hand to his mouth, tasting bile. He hid his weakness in a gesture of concentration and made as if to study in detail the blood and other liquids, leaving a trail over the good side of a ruined face. In that moment he gathered himself and breathed in deeply. He took a moment,

then another, his hand clamped to his chin. The timing of such a deed could never be a coincidence, he knew that. He knew it, and it sickened him.

Only when he felt able did he stand up.

He knew then, any thread of normality had been taken from him. And in some small way, he felt affinity with the victim. Anything he himself had left, anything he could cling to, cut in two, as if with a snip from surgical scissors. The before from the after, both clinically removed from each other, just as the eyes had been severed from their host. Here was the new dead brother to four older sisters – all residing within the archives of old cardboard boxes left to gather dust in dark places. Except.

He didn't belong here.

Almquist looked past the body back towards the rising steps. He looked back again at the corpse and scratched his chin.

It didn't belong now.

Rotor blades whipped the air to a frenzy. Ripples cascading down his trousers, Almquist nodded to Elin then thanked the pilot, before running out, hand on his blue police cap on head. He made for Oskar Lindgren waiting a dozen paces from the victim's car and murmured a greeting, then looked over his shoulder to see the helicopter rise. Engines whining, it rose unsteadily. Elin Vikland waved a farewell before it banked away, heading out over the beach. Almquist waited, watching it fly over the still dark waters of Tiveden lake, then glancing up at the gloom of the afternoon sky made for the sleek black BMW.

Lindgren reached inside, removing a small package wrapped in black plastic and offered it to him. 'We thought you'd enjoy the honor of opening it. Found it in the left rear panel. Merry Christmas.'

Almquist took it, weighing it in his hands. It was light.

'Prints?'

‘The driver’s. And others.’

‘Get what you can.’ Almquist removed himself and stood up, placing the package on the low roof of the coupé, the light rain making small impact sounds on the soft plastic.

It was rectangular, half an arm in height and half of that in width. He turned it over, pulling off the duct tape. He repeated the procedure for all the taped edges, stretching the plastic until it thinned, applying pressure until it tore. He looked for a moment, a frown creasing his forehead, raising a hand to rub his beard for a moment before offering it to Oskar Lindgren. Lindgren tore off the last of the plastic, letting it fall to ground as he held up a small canvas. He breathed out once, heavily from his nose and looked across at Almquist with a look of wonder.