

# THE FOOL CARD



*A Tarot Mystery by*

B e v a n   A t k i n s o n

## **The Tarot Mysteries by Bevan Atkinson**

The Empress Card

The High Priestess Card

The Magician Card

The Fool Card

# THE FOOL CARD



A Tarot Mystery

by

Bevan Atkinson

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For Hubert Schwyzer

“...it is in pushing back against the world  
that a soul is defined.”

Eliot Pattison, *Water Touching Stone*





I lead a very quiet life, by intention. It is not yet a dotty old lady life, but I find eventfulness unpleasant.

A few months ago I was stretched out on the couch, with Katana curled up on the armrest behind my shoulders and Meeka purring next to my feet on the ottoman.

I was content. It was late at night, dark and foggy outside, and I had crushed lemon verbena and sage leaves into a salver. The fragrance was fresh but not distracting. I was rereading Nero Wolfe, enjoying Archie and the orchids and the shad roe dinners. Mr. Brubeck was playing soothing ballads.

The fog was in—it's pretty much always in on 48th Avenue—and the Monterey Cypresses in Sutro Park were looming shapes in the cold mist

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that flew past the big plate glass window. Waves boomed against Seal Rock.

Then came the thunk. It felt like a car had hit my house. Now, my house sits almost directly on the San Andreas Fault, so I am used to the occasional thunk that feels like a car has hit my house, followed by a few seconds of chink-chink-chink as the crockery rattles and the plant leaves quiver and the chandelier Fred Astaires elegantly back and forth, dancing on the ceiling.

This thunk was followed by the sound of a car door opening and footsteps scraping on the sidewalk. Damn. My house really *had* been hit by a car.

The cats, being cats, skittered for someplace low and dark. The two mongrels, Kinsey the small brown one and Hawk the large black one, stood up and trotted to the top of the stairs leading down to the front door. They looked attentively at me, Hamlet-like, for guidance. To bark or not to bark? The readiness is all.

Then the doorbell buzzed in an odd stutter and the dogs' question was no longer a question. They barreled downstairs, giving it the full Baskerville, and kept it up until I shouted "Quiet." They went quiet.

When I reached the ground floor landing, I peered out the window in the upper half of the door. Nobody there. I stood on tiptoe and could see a long leg extending down my two front steps into the circle of front door lamplight. There was

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a large buff suede work boot laced onto a big foot.

I deduced that someone, likely a male someone, was sitting on my doorstep, leaning against the front door. It was either a one-legged someone, or there was a second leg tucked up out of sight from my angle.

Beyond the leg was a black Porsche whose bumper had taken a chunk out of the stucco beside my garage door. The house had taken a reciprocal chunk out of the Porsche.

"Who is it?" I spoke up, projecting my especially no-nonsense tone of voice. Hawk huffed anxiously until I pointed at him. He stopped huffing.

"Please help me." I heard it, but only just. A deep hoarse voice.

"I asked who you are."

"Thorne Ardall."

"I'll call 911 and tell them to send an ambulance."

"No!" Now there was power in the voice.

"Mister, I don't know you, and I'm not opening the door. If you're hurt I'll call 911. That's it."

"Please. We have to hide the car. I'm not in any shape to protect you when he comes back."

"What do you mean, 'When he comes back'?"

"Because he will. Please. There's no time."

Well, there wasn't a reason in the world to trust him, and it was late at night and I live alone, so why in holy hell did I do what I did next? What I did was, I asked myself what to do and the

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answer was clear: "You can trust him, Child. Let him in and hide the car."

Here's the thing: I read tarot cards. I don't claim to be psychic or a witch or anything overly weird. I have just learned to trust the voice that calls me "Child." I leave you to draw the inevitable conclusion that I am another loony-tunes San Franciscan begging to be axe-murdered.

It's not much of a justification, but I count on the dogs to be protective, especially Hawk, and I have a history of taking in wounded-bird types and setting them back up on their pins. In the past they've been figuratively rather than literally wounded, but...

I pulled the door open and the big man nearly tipped over against my legs, then caught himself with his right hand and braced himself on the carpet. He held his left arm against his side.

The dogs rushed forward to sniff his face, which was higher than theirs even though he was sitting. They instantly backed off and snorted. Kinsey sneezed so hard her chin thwacked against the tile floor. I could smell blood as well as something off-putting; it was slightly chemical and made my nostrils want to shut.

I was gratified to find that my deduction about the other leg was correct. There it was, bent at the knee.

"Off," I said, and the dogs backed away and wagged their tails, stiff-legged and whining. Kinsey stretched her neck forward and sniffed the

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door, bloody where this guy who claimed to be the captain of the Kon-Tiki had leaned against it.

I looked down at a light yellow oxford-cloth shirt that was almost the same shade as his mop of hair. He neither looked up nor turned to look at me.

From the way he held himself, I deduced that twisting around was not something he wanted to do. So far I was doing some tippy-top deducing. And then I engaged in some more looniness—loony even by my standards, which we are already agreed are not standard at all.

“I’m going to let you in the garage,” I said. “There’s a room in the back we can use to check out how badly you’re hurt. I can’t guarantee I won’t call an ambulance.” I pressed the garage door button and the door began to rise.

“Thank you.” As he said this he seemed to relax. Or maybe he was collapsing.

“Where are your car keys?” I put out my hand.

“The ignition.” He pulled himself to his feet, groaning as he unbent and struggled for balance. Finally he turned to look in my direction, his face shadowed as he bent forward, not making eye contact. He braced his right arm against the door frame.

“Are you going to make it without help? I’ll need a derrick if you can’t keep yourself upright.” Now that he was standing I could see he was more than big; he was middle linebacker size, six-

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foot-six or -eight, and not frail.

I'm not frail either, but I top out at five-nine and less than half this guy's weight. I'm blonde too, but I pay Mr. Trevor major bucks every month and sit for hours looking like a microwave tower in order to achieve a color this man had factory-installed.

I squelched my hair-color envy when I saw there was a bloodstain glistening across his shirt, broadest where his arm was pressed against his left side. He turned and stepped slowly into the garage, dragging his feet a little as he passed my lovely blue Chrysler 300C and headed toward the door leading from the garage to the downstairs guest room.

"There's a bathroom. Use the towels and I'll be there as soon as I pull your car in," I called to him.

"Stay," I told the dogs as I curled myself into the Porsche. It had stalled in second gear. I slid the seat forward three or four feet, stepped on the clutch, started the car, pressed the gearshift down into reverse and gave it a little gas.

The tires chirped as I rocketed directly toward Eileen and Henry Chung's new silver Lexus SUV across the street. Slamming my feet on the brake and the clutch, I shifted into first gear and tried giving the Porsche a little less gas. I remembered my Dad saying "when you're on the freeway you don't drive; you aim," so I aimed at the garage, knowing that in this car I could reach freeway

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speed in first gear. Houses in San Francisco sit on long, narrow lots, and if you have two cars you park them in tandem. The demon car chirped to a halt three inches from the Chrysler's rear bumper.

Modestly triumphant, I climbed out and went to get the dogs and shut the front door. They skittered past me as I picked up the chunk of stucco and set it down on the concrete floor of the garage. I pushed the Genie button to slide the door down behind me.

Now to see if my unexpected guest had bled to death in my brand-new guest bath. This was an event, no doubt about it, and I found it curious that it didn't feel unpleasant.

Not at all. No indeed.