



CHARACTER: Redneck  
 BAGGAGE: Unrequited Love

CHARACTER: Starry eyed rookie cop  
 BAGGAGE: Raised by overprotective parents

CRIME: Vandalism  
 CONFLICT: peer pressure

CRIME: Smuggling  
 CONFLICT: getting lost

CRIME: Counterfeiting  
 CONFLICT: being framed

CHARACTER: Frat dude/sorority girl  
 BAGGAGE: being stupid drunk\*

I don't love this draw but, in the spirit of Story Magic, I'm going to pull this together. I've rearranged the cards into what I hope is a workable order and I'm writing this in real time as I figure it out. There may be some backtracking, some switches but I'm attempting to do this in one go.

My Redneck is a guy who, due to suffering from unrequited love in his past, stays withdrawn. A loner. A ranch hand, a laborer, who is good at his work but is not willing to endure the pain of unreturned love. This is my protagonist, I think.

My starry eyed cop is a young woman who has been sheltered from the harsh realities of the world by her overprotective parents but wants to make a difference. She knows the world is harsher than she was raised to believe. She's tougher than anyone (including herself) thinks. But she's untested. There is definitely chemistry between them.

My villain is the frat dude who has the baggage of being stupid drunk. Because he is the villain, he embraces his damage. It defines him and he wears the crown of being a sick and relentless party boy. He can hold his liquor now and is not above exploiting people who are hammered.

The first crime that leads to murder is vandalism with the conflict of peer pressure. Vandalism is pretty low stakes but if, related to the scene of vandalism, there is a dead body, pressure is on. Maybe the redneck - while drunk (hello, Frat boy) - vandalized something public, like the side of a business. Someone who sold him faulty equipment that cost him a day's pay. He gets drunk in a bar. The frat boy targets him for nefarious reasons, convinces him to smash some windows or spray paint something. (vandalism + peer pressure) The redneck doesn't know that within the building or in the alley behind, there is a dead body murdered by the frat boy.

At this point, it could be a murder mystery. The intention of the villain is to hide his guilt by framing the redneck with peer pressure to vandalize.

But here comes our starry eyed cop. She believes the redneck is innocent and starts to investigate.

Let's move it into suspense, i.e. danger in present tense. We've got a dead body, sure, but is there more going on??? (Spoiler: yes!)

I've got smuggling and getting lost. In suspense, this needs to be in present tense and have heavy elements of doubt.

Is the company the redneck vandalized owned by the frat boy's father? Because you just know this douchebro is rich. And the frat boy has plans to usurp his dad's company and/or eclipse it with a con of his own. (This is a guy who is okay with roofie-ing people. He takes shortcuts. He's a dick. He's a villain. He thinks he's a genius and the rules don't apply to him.)

If this is the case, the cop can suspect there is more going on at the vandalized workplace than just the dead body. It's not a simple case of the redneck getting drunk and losing his temper. Someone is framing him to cover up something. Could it be smuggling? Trying to link in the 'getting lost' conflict card. Does the cop hide in a delivery truck trying to figure out what they're stealing? Is an important shipment declared 'lost' when it was really hijacked? Or is it some kind of money laundering thing where there is actually no inventory, only fake bills of lading etc. (Sorry, getting into the weeds. It's a delicious danger with these cards!)

The suspense is that something is being smuggled and the redneck is going to be roped into the blame. Maybe the vandalism exposed the smuggling and the frat boy is having to scramble hard to recover OR maybe the frat boy is hoping that by exposing the smuggling, he can topple his father and somehow be the alpha. Let's wait on that.

Then we move into thriller. Counterfeiting with the conflict of being framed. Oh! Maybe the frat bro is working with some grifters to undercut the quality of his father's equipment, selling cheap imported knockoffs and pocketing the margin. He thinks it's an excellent business model. Cheap, exploitative, and immoral. Think replacing John Deere tractors with crappy tin models from Temu. The frat boy plans on counterfeiting the equipment, making hay, and letting the business fail miserably once he's made bank. He'll frame the redneck for being the ringleader of the gang that swapped out the good equipment for the fakes, thereby taking care of his father, the business, and the foreman the frat boy murdered in the first act. The stakes are high - the company will fail, people will die from the faulty equipment, and the redneck will go to prison for the rest of his life in shame and disgrace.

Let's make sure we're using the baggage the best we can.

The redneck suffered from unrequited love. He doesn't believe people really connect. He has trust issues. If the frat boy can exploit his need for connection (because we are most vulnerable at the site of our damage) he can manipulate the redneck into the initial act of vandalism. Realizing he's been manipulated will just hammer that baggage, making him even less likely to trust the rookie cop to whom he is attracted. Until he learns to trust that she is being honest with him - EXAMINING HIS BAGGAGE - he cannot beat the frat boy.

The cop is an optimist, rose-colored glasses. She was coddled and cloistered as a kid and yearns to participate in the 'real world.' She may be a risk taker. She may not be great at reading people because her experience is so limited. Thus she may not trust her instincts even though she is smart and better at her job than anyone thinks. When she starts investigating the smuggling, it's going to be hard for her to wrap her head around the enormity of the crime. This isn't just fraud. This counterfeit equipment is going to cost lives. Until she comes to truly believe that the world is dangerous but SO IS SHE (EXAMINING THAT BAGGAGE), she's going to feel like she's in over her head.

The frat boy is a first class manipulator. Having survived being stupid drunk on numerous occasions and surviving without a scratch because he's a sheltered douchebro with a rich

daddy, he figures it's a dog eat dog world out there. He thinks that only the strong survive and thus he is justified in exploiting people any way he can. He thinks he survived being stupid drunk. If someone else doesn't, that's on them.

He mirrors the redneck in that they both made stupid mistakes in their youth (the redneck loved the wrong person, the frat boy drank too much too often,) The redneck's damage limited his world. The frat boy's damage defined it. The frat boy also mirrors the cop in that they both grew up feeling incredibly sheltered in a world they were told is dangerous. The cop was overly protected and had a gnawing sense that that justice wasn't being served equally, thus her desire for the badge. The frat boy took his protection as a sign that he is better than others, that his privilege was merit-based. He was just a better person and deserved better things and he therefore has a divine right to do whatever the hell he wants, no matter the cost.

That worked out better than I hoped. That's the fun of Story Magic Cards!

\*Only as I was repacking the cards did I realize that being stupid drunk is an Awkward Situation not Baggage. Sigh. I think it still works