

# Prologue

Todd adjusted his power leather seat and smiled. Now this was the good life. Driving along the California coast, road stretching empty before him, cruise control set at fifty, climate control at twenty, Brazilian coffee keeping warm in its heated cup-holder. Some might say it'd be even better to be the guy lounging in the back seat instead of his driver, but Todd liked being where he was. Better to be the bodyguard than the guy who needed one.

His predecessor, Russ, had been the more ambitious type, which may explain why Russ had been missing for two months. Odds around the office water-cooler were split fifty-fifty between those who assumed Kristof Nast finally tired of his bodyguard's insubordination and those who thought Russ had fallen victim to Todd's own ambitions. Bullshit, of course. Not that Todd wouldn't have killed to get this job, but Russ was a Ferratus. Todd wouldn't even know how to kill him.

Todd figured the Nasts were behind Russ's sudden disappearance, but that didn't bother him. When you signed up with a Cabal, you had to know what to expect. Give them your respect and your loyalty, and you had the cushiest gig in the supernatural world. Double-cross them and they'll wreak their revenge right into your afterlife. At least the Nasts weren't as bad as the St. Clouds. If the rumors were right, about what the St. Cloud's did to that shaman? Todd shivered. Man, he was glad--Lights flashed in the side mirror. Todd looked to see a state patrol car behind him, cherries whirring. Christ, where had that come from? He checked his speedometer. Dead-on fifty. He made this trip twice a month and knew the speed-limit didn't change along this stretch.

He slowed, expecting the police car to whiz past. It stayed on his tail. He shook his head. How many cars had zoomed by in the last hour, going seventy or more? Oh, but they hadn't been custom-designed Mercedes limos. Better to pull over someone who looks as if he might pass you a few twenties to avoid the hassle of a ticket. If so, they'd picked the wrong car. Kristof Nast didn't bribe mere highway patrolmen.

As Todd put on his signal and pulled over, he lowered the shield separating him from his passenger. Nast was on his cell phone. He said something, then pulled the phone from his ear.

"We're being pulled over, sir. I had the cruise set at the speed-limit."

Nast nodded. "It happens. We have plenty of time. Just take the ticket."

Todd raised the shield and put down his window. Through his side mirror he watched the patrolman approach. No, make that patrolwoman. A cute one, too. Slender, maybe thirty, with shoulder-length red hair and a California tan. Her uniform could fit better, though. It looked a couple of sizes too large, probably a hand-me-down from a male colleague.

"Morning, officer," he said, taking off his sunglasses.

"License and registration."

He handed them over with a smile. Her face stayed impassive, eyes and expression hidden behind her shades.

"Please step out of the vehicle."

Todd sighed, and opened his door. "What seems to be the problem, officer?"

"Broken taillight."

"Aw, shit. Okay then. Write me up and we'll get it fixed in San Fran."

As he stepped onto the empty road, the woman turned and marched to the rear of the vehicle.

"Can you explain this?" she asked.

"Explain what?"

As he walked toward her, his heart beat a little faster, but he reminded himself that there couldn't be a serious problem. The Nasts never used their family cars for anything illegal. Just in case, though, he flexed his hands, then clenched them. His fingertips burned hot against his palms.

He glanced at the patrol car, parked a mere two feet behind his. It was empty. Good. If things went bad, he'd only have to worry about the woman.

The officer stepped into the narrow gap between the cars, bent and checked something just to the right of the left taillight. She frowned, eased out of the gap and waved at the bumper.

"Explain that," she said.

"Explain what?"

Her jaw tightened and she motioned for him to look for himself. He had to turn sideways to fit between the cars. Couldn't she have backed up? She could see he was a big guy. He bent over as much as he could and peered down at the bumper.

"I don't see anything."

"Underneath," she said curtly.

Bitch. Would it kill her to be polite? It wasn't like he was arguing with her.

He lowered himself to his knees. Christ, was this gap narrower than he'd thought or had he been packing on the pounds? The front bumper of the patrol car pressed against his mid-back.

"Ummm, do you think you could back up your car up a little?" he said. "Please?"

"Oh, I'm sorry. Is this better?"

The patrol car pitched forward, pinning him. The air flew from his lungs. He opened his mouth to yell for her to put it into reverse, then realized she was still standing beside the car . . . which wasn't running. He grabbed the limo's bumper and pushed. The smell of burning rubber filled the air.

"Oh, come on," the woman said, leaning over him. "You can do better than that. Put some real firepower into it."

When he swiped at her, she backpedaled out of reach and laughed. He tried to speak, but could only get enough air to grunt. Again he pushed against the bumper. The rubber stripping melted against his fingers, but the car didn't budge.

"Only an Igneus?" she said. "The Cabals must really be hard up for half-demons. Maybe there's an opening for me after all. Sit tight now, and I'll be right back."

Leah opened the driver's door and climbed into the limo's front seat. She looked across the rows of buttons on the dash. Talk about electronic overkill. Now which one--

The shield between the seats whirred. Well, that saved her the trouble.

"Did everything go--" Nast began.

He saw her and stopped. His hand lifted, just off his lap, finger moving as his lips parted.

"Now, now," Leah said. "No spell-casting."

Nast's seatbelt jerked tight, taking up the slack so fast he gasped.

"Hands out where I can see them," Leah said.

Nast's eyes blazed. His fingers flicked and Leah shot backward, hitting the dash.

"Okay, I deserved that," she said, grinning as she righted herself. She looked at the seatbelt. It loosened. "Better?"

"I'd suggest you seriously consider what you're doing," Nast said. He adjusted his suit-jacket and eased back into his seat. "I doubt this is a road you wish to take."

"Hey, I'm not stupid or suicidal. I didn't come here to hurt you. Didn't even hurt your bodyguard. Well, nothing a few weeks of bed-rest won't cure. I came here to make you a deal, Kristof--oops, sorry. Mr. Nast, I mean. It's about your daughter."

His chin jerked up, eyes meeting hers for the first time.

"And now that I have your attention . . ."

"What about Savannah?"

"Been looking for her, haven't you? Now that Eve's gone, there's no one to stop you from taking what's yours. And I'm just the person to help you do it. I know exactly where she is."