

Chapter 1: Stakeout

MY STOMACH GROWLED in bossy demand for food. The aroma of baking bread drifted into the window and my mouth watered in response. Across the street, the night shift was busy running the ovens in the bread factory. My butt was asleep and I had to pee. Stakeouts were overrated.

“God, I’m starving!” I whispered. I dug my hand into my stomach in hopes it would stop growling. It just made me have to pee more.

My partner, Dec, slid a piece of gum across the seat. Oh yeah, that would do it. I stuffed it in my mouth anyway and counted the minutes until we could leave.

He said, “Okay, they should be here any minute if our intel is right. Keep watching the side door and I’ve got the front.”

A shadow moved just outside my line of sight and I shifted my night vision binoculars to the right. There they were. Two men were coming up the cluttered alley and headed into the metal door on the side of the old brick shop. This wasn’t the nicest of neighborhoods and most people would avoid it after dark. We, however, weren’t most people. In fact, I was the only *people* here. My partner wasn’t, strictly speaking, human at all. But he passed himself off as human and his supernatural powers came in handy during fights with thugs. At the moment, we were slouched inside an old crappy pickup truck staking out the brick shop.

I snapped a couple of pictures and said, “Two men headed inside.”

Dec whispered, “Uh-oh, what do we have here? Delivery truck pulling up to the front.”

We watched as four men unloaded several white barrels and some crates from the back of the panel delivery truck. Carefully, I snapped pictures and hoped I was getting their faces in focus.

“Human?” I asked.

“You tell me.”

“Nice try.” I could see into buildings if I tried. The CIA called it *remote viewing*; I called it a curse. I refused to try since Sean’s disappearance a year ago. Some might think having psychic abilities was a gift. I would disagree. It was a curse and I didn’t want any more visions branded into my memory.

He closed his eyes for a moment and muttered, “Humans. I don’t sense anything else.”

We waited until the driver came back to the truck and pulled away and then we followed him. Dec was driving and kept a good distance behind the truck. I knew my job and used the binoculars to keep track of the truck. It was very late now and the streets were empty. We had to stay pretty far behind so the driver wouldn’t notice us. Eventually he pulled up to a grey brick warehouse and parked the truck outside. After finishing his cigarette, he went inside.

“Watch the door. I’ll be right back.” Dec disappeared and reappeared next to the truck.

I stared at the door as he crawled under the truck and attached the tracking device. I held my breath and worried. In a second, he was back in the driver’s seat and we headed back to the farmhouse. Mission accomplished. We were done for the night. It was 2 a.m. by the time we got home. Killian, as usual, was waiting up for us.

“These barrels look familiar. Did you smell anything?” he asked and flipped over the picture he was scrutinizing.

“Yeah, bread,” I answered without thinking.

He didn't crack a smile. "Bread? Good job, Princess."

I groaned and rolled my eyes. I wasn't stupid. Really, I wasn't. Somehow I always seemed to stick my foot in my mouth when Killian was around. He made me twitchy and kept me off balance. He was the undisputed leader of our group; and yep, he was the boss of me. We were monitoring demon operations in the area and I was trying to help out. It was a combination of police and super-secret agent work. I wasn't a cop or a secret agent, but I was trained to kill bad guys and had excellent instincts. My intuition was nearly always right and that made me useful. Killian decided whether or not I went on missions or stayed home. So far, I only went on missions he considered safe. Tonight was one of those. Stakeouts were both safe and boring.

Tonight's stakeout was related to an investigation we started more than a year ago in Manhattan. A pain-in-the-ass demon named Dagin was using his job as an arms dealer to spread chaos and destruction around the planet. According to Killian, that's what demons did. To further that goal, his evil engineers had developed a weapon that was selling like crazy on the black market and terrorists were putting in orders from all over the world. We had slowed down progress by blowing up a large stockpile of weapons and the research lab in a farmhouse in Vermont earlier this year. That was the first time I used my new powers and worked with Declan, Killian, and Sean.

They call themselves Primani. They're the good guys: they protect humans and hunt demons. They're an elite group of warriors with amazing abilities and somehow I'd joined them. In the beginning, I was simply another of Sean's charges. He was assigned to keep me safe and to correct my destiny. When my mother died, my destiny took a swing off track and he started watching out for me from a distance. That would've been enough if it hadn't been for Scott Flynn. Scott had beaten me half to death. His attack sent my attitude, faith, and destiny into a downward spiral that was apparently unacceptable to the powers that be. Sean had to take a more active role in keeping me safe. It was a simple mission that didn't stay that way. We fell in love and nothing was the same after that. My destiny was wrapped up in his and we were connected in ways we were still trying to understand.

Drooping with exhaustion, Dec filled Killian in on the stakeout and we went over the rest of the pictures I took.

"Good shots, Mica. You're getting good with the camera. We'll need to follow up with the owner of that truck and keep watching the shop. I don't like the looks of those barrels."

Dec offered, "I'll send the pics to Alex. Maybe he can ID the men we saw tonight. It would help to know who we're dealing with."

Alex was Killian's boss. He ran the entire east coast special operations division. Killian ran our little cell but Alex supervised a dozen of them up and the down the eastern seaboard. He had all of the resources and technology available to investigate people and solve crimes. Probably we had better technology than the CIA. It helped to be supernatural too. Mind reading and teleporting, or traveling as they called it, were very useful when fighting criminals. Unfortunately, I didn't have the power to teleport so I had to hitch a ride or take a real car.

I yawned hugely. "So can I go to bed now? I'm beat."

Killian barely glanced up from the stack of pictures but waved me out of the room. Domino trotted after me. The room I shared with Sean was big and airy in the sunniness of the day. At night, however, it was shadowy and empty. I hated being alone in the dark. I kept a small nightlight burning near the closet to keep the shadows at bay. Once upon a time, I had been afraid of the demons in my closet; now I've learned there are far scarier demons roaming the streets among us. My closet had little appeal to the demons I'd met so far. Domino, my little

Dalmatian, protected me from all things creepy. As we entered the room, she walked a circuit around and paused at the windows and the closet door. Satisfied there were no human or demonic intruders, she hopped up on the bed and curled up on her pillow. With a last brown-eyed glance at me, she yawned hugely and went to sleep with her head between her paws.

I stroked her velvet ears and stared at the ceiling. Her little furry body kept me warm in the big empty bed and I was grateful for her. She was a peace offering from Sean and I smiled at the memory. It was the day he'd finally given up trying to fight his attraction to me. He had remained elusive and secretive still, but he had unbent enough to let me in. From that day forward, Sean was mine and I was his. Domino still wore the St. Christopher medallion around her neck even though it was meant for me. It was his way of saying I needed protecting and I didn't have the heart to take it off of her collar. It was part of who she was.

The dream came nearly every night now. It was always the same. I walked down an endless hallway filled with many doors. The doors were locked and unmarked. It was quiet and dark. I didn't feel afraid here. Mostly I felt numb as I drifted through the dream. There was nothing around me and I wondered what the point was. Eventually I heard someone calling my name. At first it was barely a whisper, but it grew louder as I wandered further into the darkness. The voice gained strength until I recognized it. I pressed my ear against the nearest door and listened. The voice came from behind the door. I pulled on the handle but the door wouldn't open. Louder and louder the voice called me. It was scared and the sound twisted my guts. I pulled on the door until I was exhausted and sagged against it.

There had to be a way inside...