

Part 4

Highway Escape

“So would this be an escape, or a kidnapping?” Brittany asked as she rode in the black Lincoln which was currently weaving its way through a number of small streets buried within the suburbs of the small Nebraska town she had recently arrived in. “Where the hell are you taking me, anyway?”

The sorcerer Lazarus glanced at her in the rear view mirror, but otherwise concentrated on driving the car and left the reply to Dobby, his small elf servant.

“To get some fucking help.” The elf commented, climbing onto the backrest of the passenger seat to glare down at where Brittany sat in the back. “We are trying to get your lazy ass to a safehold, where you can learn to fight this Dark Lord prick.”

“Oh, wonderful,” she replied, “but where are these safeholds of yours? And what makes you think they will be any more secure than your house we just ran away from?”

“I believe that I can almost guarantee your absolute safety while in one of the sorcerer’s safeholds.” Lazarus now spoke up, not taking his gaze from the road for an instant. “Being comprised of the most powerful defensive spells cast down by the most powerful sorcerers of their time, the safeholds do not exist in the mortal plane of reality. They float inside another dimension, much like air bubbles in a block of ice. There are paths to them that one can follow from this mundane reality, but all those paths are guarded by powerful spells. Once inside the safehold, the self-sustaining magicks that created them will provide complete protection to whomever is inside.”

“Interesting. So where are these pathways?” Brittany asked, shifting around a little in the backseat.

“They are all over the world.” Lazarus replied, “The closest one is in a forest a few states over, so settle in. We have quite a few hours of travel ahead of us, if everything goes well.”

“What might not go well?” Brittany asked with rising alarm, her stress levels already pushed to what had to be their limits. As if in answer to her question, a sudden explosion went up in the distance behind them. All the passengers in the car turned their heads back to look, and Brittany could just make out a cloud of black smoke rising into the air well over a mile away.

“I suspect that would be my house.” Lazarus said, turning his attention back to the road

ahead of them. “This is worse than I thought.”

“So those spies or whoever have discovered your illusion?” she asked.

“If only it were that simple.” the sorcerer said. “It might interest you to learn that magick produces waves that are undetectable to nearly all normal humans, but can be picked up by other sorcerers. The larger the amount of magick used, the larger the waves are and the further they will travel outward from the source of the spell. The type of wave will allow someone to identify what spell was used, but that is not all. These waves are also imprinted with a sort of magickal fingerprint, enabling anyone to discover what sorcerer cast the spell. The spell that just blew up my house was a destruction spell, cast by none other than The Dark Lord himself.”

“The Dark Lord?” Brittany exclaimed. “What the hell is he doing here?”

“That is why this situation is worse than I thought it would have been.” Lazarus remarked. “I had assumed that only human spies would be sent to track you, or possibly apprentice sorcerers who would be unable to recognize the waves produced by my earlier illusions. Although it had initially appeared this was the case, apparently I was wrong.”

“Maybe the spies or whoever was here called up this Dark Lord once they found the house.” Brittany offered up an explanation.

“No,” Lazarus disagreed, “If The Dark Lord came here suddenly, he would have used a fiery portal, which is his choice method of transportation. The magickal waves caused by that type of spell are immense and would have been felt well into other states. No, The Dark Lord must have arrived earlier by conventional means.”

As this discussion was progressing, their black car was coming up to the entrance to the highway. Silence fell as Lazarus merged onto the interstate, and as he sped up, Brittany had the sudden feeling that she had only barely escaped from great danger.

“So does that mean that the Dark Lord was in the city all along, just waiting for me to arrive?” she asked after a few minutes spent in silence, starting up the conversation once more. “Or did he follow me to your house? Maybe he took the bus or something?”

“I do not really know.” Lazarus replied, the merest hint of strain creeping into his voice. “I certainly hope it is the latter, for if he was here before you, it would mean his spy network is far stronger than I estimated.”

“How strong did you think it was?” she asked.

“Strong enough to be a fuckin’ hassle!” Dobby interjected. “And to prove it, there they

are!” He pointed out the back window. Brittany whipped around to stare at two white cars following them at a close distance. The white vehicles had mirrored windows, so she could not see the occupants. For all she knew, the Dark Lord himself could be in one of those cars.

“So what do we do now?” she demanded, turning back around in her seat to look at Lazarus.

“We must try to escape them.” The sorcerer replied. “For all we know those cars only have normal humans in them, perhaps the spies who were watching the house earlier.”

“Or it could be The Dark fucking Lord!” Dobby replied, fidgeting from his nervousness.

“No, if it was The Dark Lord, we would probably all be dead by now. Except for you.” Lazarus replied, motioning vaguely in Brittany’s direction with his right hand while the other tightly gripped the steering wheel..

A bone-jarring crunch shook the Lincoln and it took Brittany a moment to realize that one of the white cars had just rammed them from behind. When she turned to look, Brittany could see the same car, with a damaged front bumper, speeding up to hit them once more.

“I certainly hope all of you are wearing your seatbelts.” Lazarus muttered. He then slammed his boot down on the accelerator, pressing it to the floor. Both Dobby and Brittany were flung backward as the black Lincoln shot forward, within moments reaching speeds of well over a hundred miles per hour. The two white cars began to shrink in the distance as they flew along the highway, but Brittany knew that on this stretch of road there was nowhere to escape or hide.

“You will have to do more than that to get away from these guys.” Dobby remarked, now in the backseat by Brittany.

“So what do you expect us to do?” Brittany asked, noticing the white dots in the distance behind them were growing larger. “Jump on the roof of the car and get in a kung fu battle with those spies like *The Matrix*?”

“I bet you wish you fucking could.” Dobby muttered, just loud enough for Brittany to hear.

“Nothing that dramatic, I hope.” Lazarus said, quickly weaving into the left lane to pass a slow moving truck. “We will try to keep our distance from them and then lose those cars inside the next town.”

“Can’t you just blow them up or something?” Brittany asked as Dobby climbed back into

the passenger seat. “You’re a sorcerer, right? Then use some sorcery.”

“That would be a folly.” Lazarus said.

“Fuckin’ idiocy, more like.” Dobby added in.

“Destruction spells have waves that are particularly strong.” The sorcerer continued, “It would announce our location to everyone with any small magickal talent. We would throw off those white cars, but the reverberations would call The Dark Lord down on us in minutes.”

“Wonderful. So we just allow those cars to chase us.” Brittany said, craning her neck to stare through the back window at the road and the cars that were slowly gaining on them. A quick glance at the speedometer showed that Lazarus was going at 115 miles per hour. She figured the chasing cars had to be pushing at least 120. Reckless driving and car chases always made for interesting stories, she concluded to herself, something to regale the grandkids with, provided she survived long enough to procreate.

“Here they come again.” She quietly said as the two white cars came close enough for her to see the glare of the sun in their mirrored windows. Then she noticed something else. “What’s that new car?”

“What car?” Lazarus spoke up from the front, weaving into the left lane and back again.

“That big black car.” She pointed to the vehicle that was now in between the two white cars, having apparently crept up on them all unnoticed. It was a particularly large car, perhaps an old Mercedes Benz or a ’39 Packard. She had exceptionally little knowledge of cars beyond one or two, but could tell that this newcomer looked old and expensive. It was a deep black one that seemed to absorb all the light around it without reflecting any in return. No shine or gloss was apparent on the car’s exterior. It was as if a dark cloud was concealed within the tinted windows, its heavy essence hanging over the scene, but otherwise not choosing to make an appearance.

“Oh shit.” Dobby exclaimed in pure horror as he looked back. “It’s the Dark Lord.”

“The Dark Lord?!?” Brittany asked, her voice rising to a feverish pitch. “What is he doing here?”

“Great fuckin’ question.” Dobby remarked. “I am sure we are all wondering just why that bastard felt the need to show up.”

“We know he was in the area.” Lazarus spoke up. “It makes sense that he would decide to follow us and try to capture you. Although I will admit that this will greatly complicate our escape attempt.”

“I thought that the evil Lord never participated in the chases alongside the minions.” Brittany felt the need to point out this fact she had learned from reading way too many fantasy novels.

“Maybe not any of the other Lords, but as I said before, this Lord is very clever and powerful. It would be very like him to use all his strength to take us out early, before you can become a threat.”

“That makes me feel better.” Brittany muttered sarcastically. She noticed that the black car was slowly gaining on them. As she watched, the black windows in the car slowly lowered, and for a moment she did not recognize what was coming from the interior of the car. With a sudden chill Brittany realized that the mysterious objects were in fact very large and dangerous guns. Mere moments after she realized this, the occupants of the car opened fire, bullets tearing into their black Lincoln.

“Shit!” Lazarus cursed, losing control for a second and causing the battered car to swerve severely. The rear window shattered inward, blanketing the backseat (and Brittany) with broken glass. Crouching low to avoid being cut badly, Brittany quickly looked herself over to make sure she had not been shot. She had heard that one might not know if one had been shot or wounded due to shock and stress, and she was quite sure she was experiencing both of those.

She noticed that Dobby had not been so lucky. The elf was lying on his back in the passenger seat, cradling the bloody, ragged stump of what used to be his left arm. Although she knew the elf deserved it for being such a bastard, the sight of a crippling injury did absolutely nothing to lower her nervousness and tension. Amazingly, although Dobby should have been screaming and cursing in pain, but other than looking a little shocked and a lot more angry, the little elf did not seem to really mind the lack of an arm. He also seemed to ignore the fact that a good amount of his blood was now spraying over the interior of the car, including on Brittany and Lazarus.

“Dobby.” The sorcerer said, having now resumed his stoic expression although he was currently driving like mad to put more distance between themselves and The Dark Lord’s car.

Shots rang out as more bullets were fired, punching into their car before Lazarus could finish his remark to Dobby. Their car weaved dangerously out of control for a moment before Lazarus got it under control, and Brittany noticed the sorcerer was bleeding now, having been clipped by one of the shots. Once more, luck was with Brittany, for she remained uninjured by

the second round.

“Dobby, heal yourself.” Lazarus forced out from between gritted teeth, finally continuing his earlier interrupted words.

Brittany had no idea what the sorcerer meant by this, but apparently Dobby did. Brittany watched as the elf stretched out his remaining hand to cover the bleeding stump, going into a deep concentration that added even more creases to his face. Brittany could only stare as his small hand began to glow with an inner light, a brightness that seemed to take on substance and weight of its own. This thick light slowly dripped from the elf’s glowing hand onto the stump, and enveloped the massive wound forming a glowing magickal arm. The intense light faded, and Brittany could only stare as the elf’s arm was now back on his body. That was impossible, no, it was magick.

“Well, what now?” Dobby asked, having finished replacing his lost arm and now gesturing wildly with it, as if to make up for not being able to use it for a few moments.

“We create a distraction. I’ll leave that to you, Dobby.” Lazarus said.

“My pleasure.” The little elf squeaked, climbing over his bloodstained backrest and into the backseat. Once he was beside Brittany he looked out of the broken window, nearly taking a bullet in his head as he did so.

“Take this, you evil bastards!!!” Dobby shouted, as what looked to be yellow sparks shot out of his fingertips. These glowing sparks floated almost lazily towards the trio of oncoming cars, and Brittany couldn’t help but watch them in their languid travel as the three cars sped closer.

When the glowing sparks finally hit the cars, they did so with a resounding explosion, sending the two white cars flying into the air as they were rapidly devoured by green flames. It was quite spectacular. When the two cars crashed back to Earth, they were little more than piles of twisted wreckage. The black car, however, was undamaged by the attack, and kept on coming.

“He’s still there.” Brittany noted, at which Dobby’s glare only deepened.

“Tricky bastard, he is.” The elf muttered, preparing for another blast of magick.

“No, Dobby.” Lazarus interrupted him. “I need you to use your magick for something else.”

“Like what?” Brittany interjected. “It seems like he is doing a pretty good job of helping us now.” For a moment she couldn’t believe that she was actually praising the belligerent elf.

“Dobby,” Lazarus continued as if he hadn’t even heard Brittany, “I need you to open up the Chel’Tar Tunnels.”

“What? You want us to go into the tunnels? Are you crazy?” Apparently being Lazarus’ servant held no requirements about being polite to the man. “That’s suicide. We might as well stay here and let The Dark Lord catch us, because we aren’t going to fare much better down there.”

“Suicide?” Brittany asked, becoming more apprehensive as Dobby’s vehement reply had progressed. “Why is that suicide?”

“Dobby is a little fearful of the creatures that inhabit the Chel’Tar Tunnels.” Lazarus explained as he accelerated the battered car to even higher speeds. “They have a reputation for not liking sorcerers.”

“Oh, they like sorcerers alright.” Dobby bitterly mentioned. “On a fucking plate!”

“Don’t be ridiculous.” Lazarus scoffed. “Opening the tunnels is the only chance we have of escaping The Dark Lord. Now you *will* open those tunnels. That is an order, Dobby.”

“Fine, fine.” Dobby replied, slowly climbing into the passenger’s seat. “God help us all.” Which did nothing to ease Brittany’s fears.

