

THE
DEVIL'S
DREAMCATCHER

ALSO BY DONNA HOSIE

THE DEVIL'S INTERN

THE
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DREAMCATCHER

Donna Hosie

Holiday House / New York

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*For Team HOSIE:
Steve, Em, Dan
and Josh*

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1. Medusa

“How did you die?”

Why does every job application in Hell ask that question? If hiring devils bothered to read through the devil resources files that accompany the application forms, they’d know the answer.

Most of them don’t bother, though. Or if they do, the information doesn’t actually interest them. On the application for my current position as trainee patisserie chef, I wrote that I died after falling into a vat of meringue. The head chef, Michel Duberry III, didn’t bat an eye. He gave me the job before I even sat down. He just thrust a red apron at me and told me to whip up three tons of custard.

Before that I worked in the law office. On that particular application form I wrote that I died after having an allergic reaction to dental floss. My supervisor there was a strange man, even for Hell. His name was Dominic Shayman. He was enormous: tall and fat, with a stomach that made him look like he was nine months pregnant, yet he had a tiny bald head. His favorite pastime was making female devils cry—and he was very good at it. The misogynistic pig made a pass at me once. After that, I told him exactly where he could shove his job, once he removed his tiny head from it first.

I haven’t had a lot of luck with bosses in Hell. That’s one of the reasons that I’m so desperate to get the other intern position in the accounting office, because accounting interns report to Septimus.

Septimus is The Devil's head accountant and right-hand man. He's a former Roman general, and he's also the coolest person in Hell. All of the women in the kitchens have the hots for him, but then, a lot of them died in menopause so they have the hots, period. I guess we all do, though. Hell is a furnace.

I like Septimus because he remembers my name when he visits the kitchens. My new name. The one I was given by the Grim Reapers at the HalfWay House after I died. For me, the name meant a fresh start—even in death. That might not seem like a big deal, but when you exist in the heat and monotony of Hell with millions and millions of other dead souls, fresh starts aren't exactly easy to come by.

So, for the first time in my death, I'm going to take advantage of that good feeling and be completely honest on a job application—and not . . . *weird*, as some of my *former* friends here have called me.

I start writing.

Name: Medusa (formerly Melissa) Olivia Pallister

Age: 16

DOD: December 2, 1967

How did you die? I fell from the Golden Gate Bridge.

I underline *fell* twice in thick red ink because I'm telling the truth here, and I want the truth to be clear. This really matters to me. Truthful words are important, even the ones that remain unsaid. Today I manage to put my truth on paper. But I'm still not willing to talk about it.

I've never been this high up in the central business district before. It's a good thing I don't suffer from vertigo. Hell's kitchens are on level 267. Now, for the first time in over forty years of death, I've made it to level 1. I'm trying not to get nervous, but I really, really want this job. Not only would it be awesome to work for Septimus, but getting out of the heat of the kitchens might help calm my hair down.

Maybe I should have tied it back. When people talk to me, they don't look at my chest, like they do with my *former* friend in Hell,

Patty Lloyd, but they don't look at my face, either. They're mesmerized by my hair.

Now I'm starting to feel self-conscious. I look down at my clothes: long black shorts and a bright-red shirt. My Converse sneakers are bright white. Too casual? I can't wear a skirt and heels. I'd look like a baby giraffe trying to walk for the first time in that kind of outfit.

Patty Lloyd has just swept past me decked out in exactly that kind of outfit, except it should be illegal to call what she's wearing a skirt because it barely covers her ass. I've got longer underwear than what she has on. She ignored me, which is no loss. She had an interview as well, but everyone knows she only applied for the job because she wants to nail the other accounting intern, Mitchell Johnson.

I have my own, very different, reason for wanting to meet Mitchell, and—after wanting to work for Septimus and calming down my hair—that's the final reason I'm here.

I can hear voices coming from behind the smoldering stone door of the accounting office. The deep drawl is definitely Septimus's, and I'm guessing the exhausted, I've-lost-the-will-to-exist voice is coming from Mitchell.

But there's another voice: slightly hysterical and high-pitched.

Is that The Devil? Goose bumps break out on my skin. Shivers . . . now, that's a sensation I haven't felt in forty years. I press my ear against the door. I've never heard The Devil speak before. Except for pictures, I've never even seen him.

"I want to see it now, Septimus!" screeches The Devil. "He has pushed me to the edge of reason. I want to see the virus tested now. He has sent me an invoice for the damage the cherubs have done to the Pearly Gates. He says I have corrupted them. I'll show Him corruption. He won't be whining about graffiti when I have unleashed Operation H on His foul, vile, disgusting angels. We'll be hearing their screams from here. In fact, I intend to record their agony and will release it as a free download— Oh, hello, Mitchell, I didn't realize Septimus had company."

I'm jerked back from the wall against my will; I think a shadow just yanked my hair. There seem to be more shadows up here than on my floor. They're a lot bigger, too.

I don't like shadows. I don't like anything that creeps around silently. It reminds me too much of the last few years of my life before I died.

Shaking with nerves, I sit back down and straighten my shorts. My skin is hot. Maybe I should have worn long pants. By now I have sweat stains on my clothes.

Unfortunately, there's no time to even think about going back to the dorm to change, because the door to the accounting chamber opens with an eerie creak, and a head belonging to a guy with spiky blond hair sticks out. He looks left and right, and I immediately notice his pink eyes.

Mitchell Johnson clearly hasn't been dead for very long.

"Is Mr. Septimus ready now?" I ask, hoping beyond hope that The Devil won't be present during the interview. If I have to stand in a room with the master of Hell, panic is likely to dissolve me into something that hasn't been categorized by social services yet. Devils black out all the time in Hell, from fear, or despair, or pain. They say it's like dying again, because you panic with primal fear, just before your existence goes black. If The Devil's coming to my interview, I'm going back to the kitchens and crazy hair. I don't need reminding of my death—it's not something I can ever forget.

"Miss Pallister?"

Naturally, Mitchell's talking to my hair.

"Yes."

A phone starts to ring. Mitchell ignores it, but his voice mail picks up for all to hear.

"This is Mitchell Johnson, The Devil's intern. Please leave a message after the screams. . . ."

The Banshee-like wails are cut off as the devil on the end of the line disconnects the call.

"Sorry about the wait. Septimus has had to leave," says Mitchell.

“Oh.” My stomach plummets to my white sneakers. I wanted The Devil to leave, not Septimus.

“It’s okay,” replies Mitchell quickly. “Septimus asked me to do the interview. Do you want to come in for a minute while I pack up?”

I follow Mitchell into the accounting chamber, which looks like a bomb hit it. Cabinets are overflowing with folders that are too fat to be filed properly, and stacks of paper cover every surface. Plus, there’s a strange smell, like Mexican food gone bad. This office definitely needs a woman’s touch.

And a hosing down.

With bleach.

“Septimus gave me some money to take you out,” says Mitchell. His face is inches from a computer monitor, and his right hand is maneuvering a mouse across a pad that has an image of The Devil on it.

My eyes narrow. Is this a joke? Mitchell Johnson had better not have placed that ad as a ruse to get girls up here. He may score with Patty Lloyd—most devils do—but I’m more likely to smack him with the baseball bat if he tries anything with me.

Mitchell has obviously sensed my discomfort. He raises his hands and blushes furiously. His cheeks now match the color of his eyes.

Pink eyes are very cute on a boy.

“No, no, no!” he exclaims, stepping back. He trips over a wastepaper basket. “It’s not like that, honestly. Septimus gave me some money.” He shows me a thin wad of bills. “I don’t have this much money—in fact, I don’t have any money! Plus, I thought we could meet up with my friends. If they like you, that’s good enough for me. And you aced the written test with the best score by a mile. I’m not pulling a fast one on you or anything like that. Septimus was here just a second ago, but The Devil came in and . . .”

The words are tumbling from his mouth, and here I was, thinking verbal diarrhea was something only I suffered from. Mitchell

looks so worried, I can't help smiling. Sensing he isn't about to get pummeled, he slowly inches around the desk.

"So are we cool?" he asks.

Mitchell looks down at me; I look up at him. I'm not all that short—I stand around five foot seven in my socks—but Mitchell is definitely over six feet tall.

I remembered him being tall.

"You don't remember me, do you?"

Mitchell looks wary. Is he thinking of lying? I hope not, because I hate liars. It's one of the reasons Patty Lloyd and I fell out a few years ago. Mitchell's eyes have narrowed, and he's biting his bottom lip.

"No, sorry," he mumbles eventually. "We've met before?"

"San Francisco—1967," I prompt. "Does it mean anything to you?"

Mitchell shakes his head. "You're getting me mixed up with someone else. I wasn't born until 1992, and I died in 2009. And I've never been to San Fran—" Suddenly he breaks off and his pink eyes widen. His mouth is a perfect circle.

I make a whistling sound, which is easy because I have a small gap between my front teeth. "And there it is," I say. "You do remember me."

I've played this moment over and over in my head, ever since I found out I'd gotten an interview for the second accounting internship and knew I'd have a chance to speak to him. I first saw Mitchell in Hell a few weeks ago, when I was working in the kitchens. He was with Septimus, carrying a pile of dry cleaning and a tray of coffee. That was when I knew he worked with Septimus. They only came in for a strawberry cheesecake—which was added to Mitchell's pile—and then they were gone. I didn't get a close look, but I was sure it was him: the embodiment of an apparition I was certain I saw while I was still alive, many years before, on the night *he* died.

The feeling of being remembered by Mitchell is just as great as I hoped it would be. It may be just a brief glimpse of me that he recalls, and he may have needed prompting to get there, but I *am* in someone's memory.

I wasn't forgotten after all.

Mitchell is still in a daze. "There was a house. We—I mean Alfarin, Elinor, and I—couldn't remember why we were there, but that was you," he gasps. "You're the one I saw at that house. They were taking a man away in an ambulance. I saw you—and you saw me."

"Yes, yes!" I say excitedly. "So that pretty girl with long red hair was Elinor? And the huge guy—that was Alfarin? Are they here in Hell, too? What are they like?"

"They're the best."

"I knew what you were as soon as I saw you. I mean, I knew you were dead."

"How?"

"You were surrounded by light. I thought you were angels."

Mitchell snorts and digs his hands into his pockets. For some reason, he's shaking. "Yeah, right idea, wrong direction."

"So you've only been dead for four years?"

"And counting," replies Mitchell. "I... I got hit by a bus."

I'm overwhelmed by a strange urge to hug him, but I don't. I'm not like Patty Lloyd and her dorm sorority of the Underworld. I would sooner throw myself into an actual vat of meringue than throw myself at a guy, regardless of how he died.

I have so many questions for Mitchell, now that we're finally talking. What was he doing that night outside my house, for a start? And how was he there in 1967, *dead*, when he hadn't even been *born* yet?

Unfortunately, Mitchell beats me to the punch. "How did *you* die?" he asks. "Septimus said you've been dead for over forty years. You must have passed over not long after I saw you."

It's that question again. Arching my back, I glare up at Mitchell. And to think we'd been getting along so well. The strange urge to hug him vanishes. Instead, I turn around and jab my elbow into his stomach.

"Ow!"

"I don't like talking about it, and you'd know the answer if you'd bothered reading my devil resources file."

“According to the first page in your devil resources file, you talk about everything. Nonstop,” he retorts.

So Mitchell Johnson has read at least some of my file, then. He must be the first devil who’s done that. I wonder why he didn’t bother to read the rest. Then again, I’ve never bothered to read my file, either—but why would I want to, when I already know all too well how I died?

“Knowledge is power,” I tell him. He grins and ruffles my hair. No one is allowed to touch the hair, so I flick his forehead with my finger. He retaliates with “Leave it, short-ass,” which is rich coming from someone who looks like he’s been stretched out on a rack.

“Your face looks like you’re covered in fluff,” I retort. “Not enough testosterone in that puny body to grow a beard?”

We aren’t even at the door yet.

“Why are you called Medusa?”

I point to my head. “Have you not noticed the hair?”

“Can’t miss it.” But his reflexes are quicker this time, and he jumps out of my reach with a bark-like laugh. I smile in spite of myself.

“The Grim Reapers at the HalfWay House gave me that name. They misheard me in the processing center,” I explain. “I decided I liked it, but not just because of my hair. It separated me from the Melissa I was on earth. It sort of allowed me to start again, you know?”

“That’s actually kinda cool.”

“Thanks.”

“You have dimples,” says Mitchell. “You look like the Raggedy Ann doll my mom used to keep on her bed.”

I think that was a compliment, kind of. We stand there staring at each other, but it starts to make me feel strange. Not as awkward as in some of the encounters I’ve had with guys in Hell—trying to talk to the ones who are still stoned from their accidental OD back in the land of the living, for example, is a pretty ridiculous endeavor—but this is enough to make me feel self-conscious.

“Do you believe in fate, Medusa?” asks Mitchell.

“Yeah, I do,” I reply. I don’t add that I don’t consider this a good thing.

But perhaps meeting Mitchell is finally the beginning of something okay in this hope-forsaken place. I just need to give it a chance. I just need to trust. And call it a sixth sense, but I feel like I know Mitchell already.

Maybe that’s because, like Septimus, Mitchell remembers me.

“I never used to believe in fate or any of that crap, but I think we’ll make a good team,” he says. “I have a pretty good feeling about this.”

“Does this mean I have the job?”

“Yeah, why not?”

What? Easiest interview ever! (Apart from the one for the kitchens, of course, which was over before it even started.)

“*Oh, let me be the one to tell Patty Lloyd,*” I beg under my breath. “*Just this once, let me be the devil to hold something over her.*”

I pause for a moment when a little voice in my head reminds me that I didn’t always feel this way about Patty. The truth is, when she first arrived, I looked after her. She was terrified and would sob into her pillow every night. But after a while she got comfortable and chose another crowd, which wasn’t difficult because there are hundreds of us squished in the dorm. Now I can always hear her, cackling away, saying mean things about how I look and dress and talk. That witch and her cronies are always trying to lord their superiority over me.

But finally, brains and wild hair have beaten out boobs and tattoos. Mitchell turns off his computer and extinguishes a couple of candles with his thumb and forefinger. Today is going to be a good day—a rare day; I can feel it in my bones. And wiping the smug smile off Patty Lloyd’s face will be the icing on the cake.

2. Team Devil

“So does Septimus usually give you money to take devils out?”

“Are you kidding?” replies Mitchell. “That was a first. When he said he wanted to do another interview, I could have cried. I couldn’t believe he was seriously going to make me keep working. These interviews have made today the day from Hell. After the fifth one, I figured this was how Septimus had decided to punish me.”

“Punish you for what?” I ask.

“Uh, nothing.”

We push through the crowds in silence. I still desperately want to ask Mitchell what he was doing outside my house forty years ago. Seeing him and his friends that day was the first time I thought there might be something beyond the wretched life I was being forced to live. An honest-to-goodness afterlife. Not that I wanted to die, but knowing there might be something else . . . well, it gave me hope.

But I’m worried about badgering him, and I don’t want to annoy the guy who’s just hired me. I’ve waited this long to finally find and speak to Mitchell alone, and a little while longer won’t kill me—metaphorically, of course.

I decide to play it cool.

“So how long have Alfarin and Elinor been in Hell?”

“Alfarin’s a Viking. He died in battle over a thousand years ago,” replies Mitchell. “Elinor died in the Great Fire of London in 1666.”

“And how did you all meet? You aren’t the kind of guy I would expect to see hanging out with Vikings—no offense, Mitchell.”

“Why wouldn’t I hang out with Vikings?” he asks indignantly. “I can handle myself.”

“Says the boy who got hit by a bus. Wasn’t it big enough for you to see?”

“I was . . . distracted.”

“By a girl in a short skirt, no doubt.”

I’m only teasing, but Mitchell isn’t smiling. At first I think I’ve offended him—I’m not very good at making jokes—but then I realize he isn’t paying any attention to me at all. He’s looking at *her*. She’s clearly been waiting for him in the shadows, ready to pounce like a leopard. A mangy one. With fleas.

“Uh, hi, Patty,” mumbles Mitchell at the figure swaying toward us. Honestly, if she moved her hips any farther from side to side she’d dislocate them.

“Hello, Mitchell.” Patty flutters her eyelashes at him and then glares at me, but her pink eyes don’t have the same ferocious intensity as red, and she’s years away from that. I smile sweetly because I know it will annoy her.

“I have some free time right now,” she says, turning her attention back to Mitchell. “I’m doing the late shift at the library tonight. I thought we could practice some of the things we’ll be doing together in the office.”

The Easy-Lay-from-the-Library licks her lips and winks. I don’t know whether to laugh at how obvious she is, or push her annoying dead ass over the balcony. I once pushed Patty into a vat of crème caramel when she came by the kitchens to heckle me, and she dragged me in with her on her way down. It took me a month to get all that sugar out of my hair, but it was so worth it.

Mitchell’s voice brings me back to the present. “Sorry, Patty, but Septimus meant it when he told you you’re too valuable to the library to leave it,” he says. “And also, Medusa got the job.” The tone of his voice fills me with confidence. He seems pleased.

Patty looks horrified. This is even better than if I’d told her

myself! “Well, we’d love to stay and chat, Patty,” I say. “But Septimus gave us some money for a date, and it’s burning a hole in Mitchell’s pocket. Enjoy your night shift—alone.”

Mitchell is still laughing as we reach Thomason’s Bar. I’m on such a high that if we weren’t trapped underground, I’d be touching the clouds Up There. This was the best revenge I could have wished for after Patty and her friends’ latest prank on me. Last week they thought it would be funny to make hundreds of posters with *ESCAPED ANIMAL* written in bold letters across the top and my picture below. They plastered the posters on every free surface in the library. I took them all down myself, one by one. I wasn’t going to ask for help. I didn’t need anyone’s help. But I spent every moment wishing someone would at least offer. After what just happened, I have a feeling that if Mitchell had been there, he’d have given me a hand.

Inside Thomason’s, I recognize Alfarin and Elinor at once. Alfarin is built like a house. He has long blond hair and a beard with tiny braids in it. His enormous frame is balanced precariously on a stool as he stands on tiptoe, poking at something on the ceiling with a double-bladed axe.

Elinor has the longest hair I’ve ever seen. It cascades down her back like a red waterfall. It’s so pretty—and straight. I would love to have hair like that instead of always looking like I’ve been electrocuted. For some reason, she’s grabbing the back of her neck like she’s nervous about something, which, judging by the wobbling Alfarin, is probably his balancing skills.

“Will ye get down from there, Alfarin?” begs Elinor. “Ye cannot kill a fly with yer axe. Ye will fall and hurt yerself, ye big oaf.”

“I will make this pestilent creature rue the day it decided to buzz around my princess,” says Alfarin grimly.

Seconds later there’s an almighty crash as Alfarin topples off the stool and breaks the table where Elinor is sitting. Glass shatters. The unharmed fly buzzes past my ear and is then caught and swallowed by another Viking about to take a large swig of beer.

“*Alfarin!*” roars a bald man from the other side of the room. He

has a golden moustache and a long, matted beard that reaches his stomach. He's clutching a black mace, which is swinging like the pendulum on a grandfather clock.

"My apologies, father brother," calls Alfarin. He is trying to extricate Elinor from shattered glass, which is glinting like a pool of fire in the torchlight. "I will gladly repair any damage."

"Who's the Viking with the mace?" I whisper to Mitchell. "And what's a father brother?"

"That's Magnus, Alfarin's uncle. That's what Vikings call a father brother. And the Viking behind the bar is Alfarin's cousin, Thomason. He owns this place. And see the guy with the long dark hair and short beard, throwing darts at that guy tied to the spinning board? That isn't a guy at all. It's actually Alfarin's great-aunt Dagmar."

I stick out like a sore thumb in this sea of enormous people and weaponry, and it isn't long before everyone's eyes—deep bloodred, of course—start drifting from the puffing Alfarin to the girl who looks like she has snakes for hair.

"Mitchell!" squeals Elinor. "Alfarin, look. Mitchell has brought someone to meet us. And it's a girl!"

"Mitchell, my friend," booms Alfarin. His heavy boots crunch through the glass as he scoops Elinor up and over his shoulder. He's still carrying her as he makes his way over to us.

"Put me down, ye fool!" she cries.

"Alfarin, Elinor, this is Medusa," says Mitchell, ignoring the mess. "She's going to be working with me in the accounting office as the other intern."

"Lovely to meet ye." Elinor beams and then kisses me on both cheeks. It's the first time a devil has ever done that to me. Actually, it's the first time *anyone* has done that to me, alive or dead.

I want to like it, but trusting people in Hell is as difficult as trusting people in life.

"Alfarin, son of Hlif, son of Dobin," says Alfarin very formally. He isn't smiling, and I'm a little alarmed as he swings his axe upward, catches it in his right hand and then drops to his knee.

“Your devoted warrior from this day forth,” he continues. “You need only say the name of any foul devil who has slighted your person, and my faithful axe will slice open his entrails, which shall be tied around his neck until he is throttled—”

“Get up, Alfarin,” scolds Elinor. “We don’t want to frighten Medusa off before she even knows us.”

“Yeah, let her get to know us first, and *then* she can make a run for it,” says Mitchell.

“It’s nice to meet you all.” I try smiling at them, but my top lip sticks to my teeth and then my bottom lip starts to betray me.

Stop it, Medusa, I say to myself. My hands are in my pockets, so I pinch my leg—hard. I am not a crybaby. I’ve never been a crybaby. Life made me tough; death made me tougher. I will not lose it because I’ve finally found the three angels who were outside my house that day.

Devils, I correct myself. They were devils. They only looked like angels.

“Ye frightened her, Alfarin,” says Elinor, and she rubs the back of her neck again. “I’m so sorry. He is lovely once ye get to know him. Please don’t be worried, Medusa. It will be so nice to have another girl on the team.”

“It isn’t that,” I say quickly. “It’s just . . .” But I can’t quite bring myself to say it aloud.

Mitchell steps in and explains for me in a hurried whisper. “Guys, I know this is crazy, but Medusa has seen Team DEVIL before. When she was *alive*.”

Elinor and Alfarin exchange worried glances.

“How is that possible?” asks Elinor softly.

“Remember San Francisco?” Mitchell says quietly.

“What? San Francisco!” Alfarin exclaims.

“Shhhhh,” hisses Elinor, frantically flapping her hands. She looks about wildly to see if anyone has heard us.

“Elinor is right. I am sorry, Mitchell,” says Alfarin. Then he pats my hand awkwardly. “And I apologize for the throaty manliness of

my voice, Medusa. I do not possess Mitchell's ability to whisper like a girl."

"Thanks for that, Alfarin," says Mitchell. "Look, Septimus gave me some money, so let's go get something to eat. Somewhere quiet, so we can talk without being overheard."

Alfarin, Elinor and I all turn and make a quizzical face at Mitchell. Somewhere quiet? In Hell? You can't go to the bathroom without an audience. Privacy is left with your pulse back in the land of the living.

"You know what I mean," says Mitchell, rolling his pink eyes.

The four of us leave Thomason's. Vikings are still watching us. Watching me.

The boys follow their stomachs, and Elinor and I follow the boys.

As we walk, I can't help thinking how strange this all is. I'm just not used to devils being so nice to me. I can't help worrying that I'm not going to be very good at being a friend—if that's what they eventually want me to be. I *hope* it's what they eventually want me to be. It's lonely sometimes, being on the outside of a crowd.

Yet there's something about Team DEVIL that seems so . . . nice. They give me this feeling of familiarity that's warm and snuggly, like clean sheets.

"So, how long have ye been in Hell, Medusa?" asks Elinor. She's wearing a long white dress and satin slippers, and she appears to float above the floor as we push through the bustling crowds of devils.

"Over forty years," I reply. "I died in 1967."

Elinor opens her mouth to say something, but she catches my eye and quickly closes it again. I know what she's going to ask—it's what every devil asks—but I appreciate the fact that she doesn't.

"How long have you known Alfarin and Mitchell?" I ask.

"I searched for Alfarin for nearly one hundred years after I arrived in 1666," she says. "Mitchell was easier to find, once I knew which logbooks to read."

"Why were you looking for them?" I ask, intrigued. "You lived

too late for Alfarin and too early for Mitchell to have known them in life, right?”

Elinor gasps, and her pale hands with their long, delicate fingers fly to her mouth. Mitchell and Alfarin stop walking when they hear her, and she and I bump right into them.

Okay. Clearly, Elinor feels she’s revealed something to me that she shouldn’t have, and Mitchell and Alfarin know it. I have no idea what their issue is, but I do know there’s definitely more to Team DEVIL than meets the eye.

Rumors have been flying lately that Hell is running out of food, but not for people like me who know where to look. I guess there are some benefits to having worked in the kitchens for so long.

A little while later, after I’ve managed to swipe four pizzas and a strawberry cheesecake from the kitchen prep area, we all head back to level 1 and the accounting office. Elinor is biting her nails, and Alfarin is actually attempting to tiptoe as we make our way through the corridor where shadows are fighting on the walls.

I want to make a good impression for many reasons, so I keep quiet, even though the shadows freak me out.

“I don’t like this,” whispers Elinor. “What if security finds us? What if The Devil is still in his office? I don’t like being up this high.”

“I would agree with you, my princess,” replies Alfarin. “But, alas, my need for a meat feast pizza is greater than my worry of meeting the Overlord of Hell. If he should find us, know that I will sacrifice myself, so you may flee.”

“Once you’ve eaten the chicken and spinach pizza first, you mean,” says Mitchell, catching my eye. He’s very funny for someone who’s only been dead for four years. Most new devils spend their first ten years in a state of total hysteria, but Mitchell is pretty stoic.

We reach the thick stone door of the accounting office and I notice that something creepy and dark is dripping down its center. Mitchell puts his finger to his lips and we all stop dead in our tracks. We’re holding our breath, which is ridiculous because we’re dead and we don’t need to breathe.

A feeling of recklessness comes over me. I want to get into the accounting chamber. I need to know why these devils were outside my house, and why *then*. The evening I saw them was the evening that Rory—the evening that *he*—was taken away. Forever.

That was the evening that should have changed my life for the better, but it didn't.

I gently push past Mitchell and open the door. The chamber is bathed in a strange, pale haze as sparks from blue currents zap and splinter along the walls.

“Get in quick,” says Mitchell urgently, and he pulls Alfarin and Elinor inside behind me.

“What are those, Mitchell?” I ask, pointing to the electrical bolts that crack like whips.

“It's a sign that The Devil is in a foul mood. It happens all the time these days. Let me just listen in on the Oval Office. If he's still in there, we need to run. Don't worry, Medusa. You'll get used to the crazy stuff up here—eventually.”

But it isn't the fact that The Devil might be in the Oval Office that's worrying me at the moment. It's the fact that I'm going to be working in an office that has electricity moving along damp walls. If I come into contact with one, my hair is going to explode into its own mushroom cloud.

Mitchell puts his ear up to another door and closes his eyes in concentration. Alfarin has his axe clenched tightly between his plate-sized hands, and Elinor is shaking so hard she looks as if she's about to drop the box with the strawberry cheesecake.

I take it from her trembling hands. “Save the cake first” is my motto. Gingerly, I step over discarded coffee cups that have clearly been thrown *at* the recycling bin instead of *in* it, and I place the cheesecake box on the messiest desk I've ever seen. And I thought lawyers were disorganized.

“Thank ye, Medusa,” whispers Elinor. “Can ye hear anything, Mitchell?”

“All quiet on the Devil front,” he replies. “Now, who has the pizza?”