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REVENGE OF THE EVIL LIBRARIAN.



MICHELLE KNUDSEN



WALKER
BOOKS

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For Brent Felker,
who is the kind of friend I'd like to be someday

Chapter

01

Italian class is not what it used to be.

I am thinking this as I watch Signor O'Flannigan list our summer vocabulary words on the board. Signor O'Flannigan is young and enthusiastic and very, very nice. He flashes his sunny smile constantly and never yells at anyone and will talk to you in English outside of class without giving you a hard time about it. He is different from Signor De Luca (may he rest in peace) in pretty much every possible way. Almost everyone loves him.

But almost everyone has no idea what really happened to Signor De Luca. They don't even know he's dead. They especially don't know that the reason he's dead is because he was trying to help us defeat the evil librarian who was taking over the school and bewitching my beloved best friend.

They don't know that he would still be alive right now if

Ryan and I had never gone to him for help. Which is something I keep trying not to think about, but it's not easy. His memory is like a grouchy Italian dagger permanently embedded in my heart.

Today, incidentally, is the next-to-last day of school. (Tomorrow is a half day, consisting only of homeroom and an assembly, and therefore barely exists.) It's cute that Signor O'Flannigan is trying to teach a final class. No one is paying any attention to him.

Annie, the aforementioned beloved best friend, is sitting next to me, not only here and alive but also free from the influence of any demonic love spells. (I know that generally goes without saying about people, but Annie is a special case.) She is doodling in her notebook and daydreaming about her not-very-secret love interest. She's drawing little hearts and flowers and various intertwined versions of the initials A and W. (His name is William. He's in third-period statistics with her, and she talks about him a lot. A LOT. It's adorable.)

One row over and two rows up from where I am sitting, the lovely Ryan Halsey is also here and alive. He is also now my boyfriend (!!!) which perhaps I may have neglected to mention thus far. He is not very subtly playing a game on his phone. I forgive him for doing this instead of sending me sexy messages or turning around to give me affectionate looks or using this time to write me a sonnet or something because I am a really awesome girlfriend.

I am observing the people I love in this room and basking in their continued here-and-aliveness, and feeling so relieved that none of us are consorts to horrible demons for

all eternity. I know I maybe seem to be fixated on the whole still-here-and-alive thing, but it was a big question for a while there in the fall. We all almost died. *Everyone in the whole school* almost died.

Annie was the only one in danger of becoming a demon consort, though. Well, other than Aaron, but he is old and does not go to our school and is not someone I care about. Plus, he *wanted* to be a demon consort, so there really wasn't a downside for him. Oh, and Danielle, but that was very sudden and brief and hardly counts. Plus I don't really like her all that much. Although I'm still glad she wasn't killed or made a demon consort.

It is possible that, out of context, none of this makes any sense at all.

Let us review:

During the fall semester, a ridiculously attractive but also very, very evil demon (Mr. Gabriel) set up shop in our high school as the new librarian and tried to steal away my best friend to be his demonic child bride. He killed some teachers, including poor Signor De Luca and our super-nice principal, and sucked out parts of a lot of kids' souls or life forces or whatever, but in the end I totally vanquished him. Well, with some help. Some very welcome help, like from Ryan, and some less-welcome-but-still-necessary help, like from the demoness who temporarily posed as our replacement Italian teacher.

The help from the demoness was tricky because it required me to make a promise to return to the demon world twice more at times of her choosing. Because it turns out I have some innate demon resistance that she can borrow to

use against other demons if I let her. (The rather insulting technical term for the kind of human I am is *super-roach*. Or at least that's the rough translation of the unpronounceable demon word.) It's kind of complicated, I guess. But the short version is that I let her borrow my resistance the first time to help her become queen of the demons, and in return she gave me some (highly questionable) magic items that (nevertheless) helped me to kick Mr. Gabriel's evil ass and save Annie from him forever.

No one else actually knows about the thing where I have to return twice more to the demon world. Except the demoness, obviously. And the aforementioned Aaron, who used to be the guy who ran the esoteric bookstore and who later, sort of thanks to me, achieved his (highly questionable) lifelong dream of becoming the demoness's consort and going to live with her in fiery bliss until the end of time. He doesn't matter. The people who do matter—Annie, Ryan, Leticia, Diane—have no idea. Actually Leticia and Diane have no clue about any of the demon stuff at all. They just thought I was going through the usual tech-week stress during the time leading up to our *Sweeney Todd* fall musical production. Which I was, of course. There was just also a lot of extra stress involving multiple demons and Annie going temporarily crazy and many complicated and confusing feelings regarding Ryan, who confessed his growing affection for me right before I stabbed him with a magic protractor so I could get sucked into a vortex to the underworld.

But! All the stuff with Ryan worked out in the end. Did I mention that he is now my boyfriend? Also, he has forgiven

me for said stabbing and for almost dying in order to save Annie. And for some lying that happened, since we agreed no more lying from now on. And so no more lying. Except about the two-more-trips-to-the-demon-world thing. But that's an old lie, not a new one, and so the rule does not apply.

Okay—enough about all the demon stuff. I don't want to dwell on bad things. The bad things are over now. Now is the time of happiness and joy across the land.

Exhibit A: Annie is not a demon bride! Also, she is alive and well and beginning to have a non-demony real-life love connection with an actual human boy.

Exhibit B: Ryan Halsey is my boyfriend!

Exhibit C: In exactly eight days, I will be getting on a bus with Ryan to go to Allengate, the theater camp he has been attending nearly every summer of his entire life. This is because (a) he got his parents to talk to my parents about how great the camp is, and (b) thanks to Mr. Henry's glowing recommendation and my set-design notes and sketches for *Sweeney Todd*, I was accepted into the camp's highly competitive set-design track, which means I will get to be set designer on one of the shows going up during each three-week session. I will be there for three sessions, and so that is three entire shows I get to design sets for, and I am incredibly excited about this. They even have mock Tony Awards at the end of each session, and I am going to win all of the set-design awards, because that is the kind of goal I like to have.

And while I am designing sets and winning awards, I will get to spend the *whole summer* with Ryan. Up in the woods

somewhere. And I will get to watch him be amazing in whatever shows he gets into while I am being amazing designing the sets for whatever shows I get assigned to, which will maybe hopefully even be the *same* shows, and it is going to be the best summer ever in the history of summers.

When the bell rings, Signor O'Flannigan calls out some kind of have-a-good-summer-but-also-keep-practicing-your-Italian nonsense, but I'm not listening because (a) that's just silly, and (b) I'm too busy watching Ryan slide out of his chair and turn and walk toward me. It's rather a breathtaking sight. Even after all this time.

It's funny; in some ways I feel like I've known him forever, and in other ways he is still a big beautiful frustrating mystery. He's the only one who really understands (almost) everything that happened. We have shared experiences that no one else can even begin to imagine. And we've only gotten closer since then, even without the threat of horrible death to accelerate our connection. But I can still hardly ever tell what he's thinking. And he still makes me feel ridiculous and light-headed a lot of the time. Like right now. I've watched him get out of his chair at the end of Italian approximately forty-six times this semester, and you'd think I'd be over it, but I'm not. He is both strong and graceful, like a leopard or a ninja, and he kind of slides up and out and turns in one lovely fluid motion. And then he gives me one of those lopsided half smiles, and I have learned to remain sitting until after that part.

Once the smiling happens and I've adjusted, I can get up, too. And then he comes right up to me, which, I know, is

normal, because he's my boyfriend and everything, but there is still a tiny part of the old Cyn lurking in the back of my brain who can't help shrieking with excitement that Ryan Halsey is standing RIGHT THERE. I tell the old Cyn to get a grip, but she just can't.

"Last Italian class of the year," Ryan says, shaking his head in mock sadness. "Are you sad? Do you need a hug?"

"I'm devastated. Please hug me."

He does. My legs forget to hold me up for a second, but they remember eventually.

"See ya later, lovebirds," Annie says, squeezing past us. This is her current favorite thing to call us. She has penned multiple drawings of Ryan and me as lovestruck ornithurae. I have some of them in my room. Others had to be destroyed, because, my God, that girl has an obscene imagination.

"See you at lunch," I say from against Ryan's shoulder.

"See you tonight," Ryan says to her, turning both of us awkwardly around because he's still hugging me. "Are you bringing William?"

I punch him as well as I can while still in the hug because he has been warned that the whole William thing is a very new and delicate situation. Annie glances away. "I—maybe. I haven't asked him yet. But yeah, maybe. I mean, that would probably be fun, right?"

"Ask him," I command, snaking a hand free to point at her. "You promised."

"Okay, okay," she says, backing toward the door. Then she flashes me a quick smile. "Probably." And then she's gone.

Reluctantly, I say to Ryan, "If you don't let me go, I'm

never going to make it to English on time.”

“It’s the last day. No one will care.”

“And you’ll be late for Schwartzman. *He’ll* care.”

“Hmm.”

“And I will see you later.”

“But that’s later. I like now.” He squeezes me a little tighter.

See? These are the things that make me love him.

“I like now, too,” I say, trying and failing to get free. And not really minding, obviously. But he really will get in trouble if he’s late. Even on the last day. “But...”

Finally he sighs, which, on the inhale, presses his lovely chest momentarily even tighter against mine, then lets me go.

“Oh, all right.” He gives me a steely look. “I want more of that later.”

“If I must.”

“You must.”

“Okay, then.” I feel myself grinning in that ludicrous helpless way I do when I look at him for too long. It’s such a relief not to have to try to hide it. He grins back, which only makes me grin more, and so I push past him and out the door before we get stuck in some kind of endless grinning black hole that no one can ever escape.

I’m still grinning when I get to my next class, even though I’m a few seconds after the bell. And even when I finally get my face to stop, the grinning continues on the inside. I know, I know: I’m ridiculous. Whatever. There’s nothing I can do about it, and, honestly, I’m just too happy to care.

At lunch, Leticia and Diane and Annie are already at our usual table when I arrive.

Leticia begins to sing the Miss America song as I approach. I give her a quizzical look as I sit down, and she shrugs. "It just felt right. I went with it. I'm sure there was some Sondheim song or other I could have chosen, but you know I don't know crap about musical theater."

"True," I say. "I don't mind being sung the Miss America song. Does this mean I have to devote my reign to bringing about world peace?"

"Or ending world hunger," Diane says.

"Or reversing climate change," Annie puts in.

"I'm exhausted already. I'm just going to eat my lunch."

"Good idea," Leticia says. She looks down and contemplates her own lunch. I look, too, and then put my sandwich down without taking a bite.

"What is that?" I ask.

Diane leans in. "L is only eating things that are green this week."

"Oh," Annie and I say in unison.

Leticia's lunch consists of sliced green peppers, a spinach salad with edamame and asparagus, a tiny (green) Tupperware container of guacamole, and some green Jell-O. None of us says a word as, after a minute, she goes for the Jell-O first.

"Anyway," Diane says finally, "do you guys want to come over before the party later? We can all leave from my house together."

"Sure," Annie says. "I can never get ready at my house

without one of the siblings trying to ‘help’ me.”

“Good,” Leticia says to Annie. “Maybe our combined forces can prevent you-know-who from wearing something utterly inappropriate.”

“You can try,” Diane says, winking at L. She looks at me. “Cyn?”

“Absolutely. I need to get my Annie and Leticia and Diane time in before I leave for camp.”

Annie pouts. “I still can’t believe you’re leaving for the whole summer. The *whole summer*. Who does that?”

“Future Broadway backstage megastars, that’s who,” Leticia says. She reaches over and pats Annie’s hand. “Don’t worry. We’ll keep you company. If you’re not too busy with sweet, sweet William.”

Annie turns a highly amusing shade of scarlet. “Will you guys quit it? He’s not — I’m not —”

“Yeah, yeah,” I say. “Did you ask him yet?”

“About tonight?” Diane asks in alarm. “You mean you didn’t ask him already?”

“No,” Annie moans. “I can’t. I want him to come, but I can’t just walk up to him and say, ‘Hey, want to come to a party with me?’”

“Yes, you can!” Diane and Leticia and I insist together.

Suddenly Diane looks up and then uses both feet to kick all of us under the table. We all turn to follow her gaze.

William is walking toward us. Leticia and Diane smile brightly at him. Annie seems to be trying to melt into the floor.

I watch him approach. William is super cute in a very slightly nerdy kind of way. Hipster glasses, plaid shirt, dark skin, and light-brown eyes. But he's got a little bit of a swagger, and there's something in his smile that is definitely not textbook angel. Like he's ninety percent sweetness and light and ten percent the opposite, but in all the best ways.

I think he's perfect for Annie.

I think she thinks so, too. Which is why she's so terrified.

"Hi, there," Leticia says when he reaches our table.

"Hey," William says, looking around to address all of us. Then he looks at Annie. "Can I talk to you for a minute?"

Annie nods and gets up without making a sound, following him over to the side of the cafeteria.

We stare shamelessly.

"Can you hear anything?" I ask.

"Nope," Diane says. "Too far. And my lipreading sucks."

"Their body language is good," Leticia says. "See how he's leaning in? I wish Annie would uncross her arms, though. It sends the wrong signal. Ooh! Uncrossed! Good girl. Now touch his hand. Touch it! Touch it!"

Diane lays her hand on L's arm. "I don't think she can actually hear you, honey."

"I know. I'm trying to send messages to her unconscious. It worked with the arms uncrossing."

We continue to watch them. He smiles, she smiles, *he* touches *her* hand, and then he walks away. Annie watches him go, a beatific smile still on her face.

Finally she comes back to us and sits down.

“Well?” Leticia says. “What happened?”

Annie’s smile gets even bigger. She’s having trouble looking at us. “He asked me to go to the party tonight. I didn’t even know he was friends with Sarah.”

“Yay!” Leticia shouts, loud enough for people at neighboring tables to look over. We all shush her.

“Yay,” she says more quietly. “Although I still wish you’d asked him first. You need to take charge of your own destiny, girl!”

“Okay, okay,” I say. “One step at a time. The important thing is that Annie is going to the party with William.”

“Yes,” Diane agrees. “Is he going to pick you up? Did you tell him to come to my house? Do you know what you’re going to wear?”

“Do you own any eye shadow?” Leticia asks.

Annie looks at me helplessly. I put a protective arm around her. “No more questions, please. All will be revealed in the fullness of time. For now, everyone eats her lunch and is happy. Except you, L. I know you can’t possibly be happy while eating that lunch.”

“Shut up. It’s a thing I read about. It’s supposed to be super healthy.”

“Green Jell-O?” Diane asks.

“Did you not hear me say shut up? What are you eating, dead fish in thick, slimy, white, disgusting sauce? Again?”

Annie puts her head on my shoulder as L&D continue their not-an-actual-argument, sounding even more like an old married couple than they used to. Their longtime best-friendship transformed into something more over the past few months,

which surprised nobody, although I suspect there are more than a few disappointed teenage boys scattered about as collateral damage.

I pet Annie's soft brown curls. "It's going to be okay," I tell her. "He likes you. You like him. This is good. I promise."

"Okay," she says. "I trust you. You'd know if he was a ... you know. Right?"

"Right," I say. It is not the first time she has asked me this question. One of the almost certainly unintentional gifts the evil librarian left me with was the ongoing ability to see if someone is a demon in disguise. Demons, to my enhanced eyes, have a glowing red halo kind of thing above their heads. William is entirely halo free.

I haven't seen any red halos since I returned from rescuing Annie from the demon world.

And that is the way I would like it to stay forever, please.

Except for those two return trips, I guess, since that would be hard to pull off. But I am still not thinking about those. It could be years before the demoness calls on me again. It could be never if she forgets that humans only live for like eighty to a hundred years, if we're lucky. Sometimes at night, when I can't sleep, I comfort myself with the idea that I'll probably be dead long before she thinks to call in her remaining favors.

Later, we go to Sarah Patel's annual end-of-the-school-year party. (Earlier, we went to Diane's, and Annie let us tell her what to wear and also let us put just a little extra eye makeup on her, and Diane did not let us tell her what to wear, and when William came to pick Annie up, we refrained from

shouting lewd suggestions out the window at them.)

And now I am snuggled on a couch with Ryan, nestled under his perfectly muscled upper arm, watching the party go on around us. Everyone is slightly manic with pre-summer energy. The seniors are talking about where they're going to college, and the few freshmen Sarah invited are mostly haunting the fringes of the room, not really knowing how to act or whom to talk to. The sophomores and juniors are more relaxed; most of us have done this before, and it's nice to not be nervous about being young and new and also not be distracted by being about to graduate and start whole new lives in possibly faraway places.

But it is the start of my last week before camp, which has me nervous in all kinds of other ways. I've never gone away for the summer before. I'm excited, of course, but also I know I'll miss Diane and Leticia and especially Annie. They promised to write and send care packages, but that will not be the same as actually getting to see them and talk to them. This is one of those camps where you have to surrender your cell phone when you get there, and laptops and tablets are not allowed. I guess that's so we can get the "full summer camp" experience, like they did in the old days, or whatever. But it means I won't even be able to talk to Annie on the phone. I'm sure once I'm there I'll get caught up in the shows and everything else, and it won't be so bad. Ryan loves this place like crazy, and that alone makes it something worth experiencing. And the idea of spending the whole summer immersed in musical theater is like some kind of magical dream. I know it will be great. It will.

But I keep feeling more and more uneasy.

All night long, I keep thinking I see something out of the corner of my eye, only to turn my head to find nothing out of the ordinary. Just people having a good time at a party.

I catch a glimpse of Annie and William, who have not left each other's side for a second all night as far as I can tell, sitting on the floor in a corner, their heads close together as they talk.

I see Leticia and Diane dancing together through the door into the next room, laughing and holding hands.

I see random other people from my classes, some theater kids, some of Ryan's friends whom I've met over the past few months, some kids I only know vaguely from the hallways or study hall or wherever else. The few strangers don't seem at all out of place; just other kids that I never happened to have a class with or pass often enough in the hall to recognize. Nothing is wrong. Everything is fine. But I can't stop turning my head trying to see ... something.

"Why are you all twitchy?" Ryan asks, his question tickling my ear as he leans close to be heard over the music. I am tempted to pretend not to hear him so he will lean even closer, but I'm too distracted by ... whatever keeps distracting me.

"I don't know. Something ... feels weird. I keep thinking I see something."

I feel his body tense where I'm leaning against it. "See what?" Just like me, there is some part of him that will always be waiting for another demon to appear.

Always.

I shake my head, frustrated. "I don't know." I look at him and smile weakly. "It's probably nothing. It's definitely

nothing. I'm just having end-of-the-year hallucinations or something."

"Oh, right. Those. Of course."

"It doesn't matter." I try to make this true. "Whatever it is, it's nothing. I'm probably just tired. And excited. Only one more week before camp!"

"Okay," Ryan says. "But you'll tell me if ... you know?"

"Of course!" I elbow him for asking such a stupid question. Even though I suppose he has some tiny justification for wanting to remind me of the rules of disclosure. "But it's not anything like that."

"Okay." He smiles at me, and that helps a lot to make me forget whatever else might be going on in the room.

"Okay," I say, smiling back.

Then he pulls me closer and kisses me, and the rest of the room no longer has any significance whatsoever.

This is good, Old Cyn reminds me from somewhere in the back of my brain. Everything is good. Everyone is alive and happy and good and this is going to be the best summer ever. Theater camp! All summer! Ryan Halsey is your BOYFRIEND!

Yes, I know. Now shut up. I'm busy.

I focus my attention back on the kissing.

Oh my God the kissing.

I will never get tired of this.

It is going to be the best summer ever.