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### Excerpt from Chapter 3: The Job Eternal

Ten minutes later, Shannon held a door open for me as I stepped past her and into a room jammed full of people—and not just anyone. The room was packed wall-to-wall with huge, well-muscled guys! My stomach dropped. I'd been mistakenly drafted by the afterlife division of the NFL. This had to be a mistake.

Shannon placed a firm hand on my back and nudged me further into the room. I tried in vain not to gawk at the scene around me. Beefed-up guys sat conversing around twenty-five round tables. The atmosphere felt relaxed, almost like a break room. I couldn't pick up full conversations as we wove our way through the room, so my mind worked overtime inventing some of my own.

*Hey man, what did you do today?* the guy in the skintight purple T-shirt that said "I ROCK" on the front would say. And the dude on his left would answer in a deep, Schwarzenegger-esque accent, *I picked things up and put them down.*

We reached the other side without stopping to talk to anyone. Shannon placed her palm on the wall and produced another hidden door.

From my limited view behind Shannon's head, it appeared to be a gym of some kind. Not even the high-decibel manly noises coming from behind me drowned out the unmistakable sound of metal on metal. Shannon stepped to the side. That's when I saw, on the far end of the gym, two fighters locked in a death match. They were bearing down on each other so quickly I could hardly distinguish the movements. The source of the sound was the thick, heavy swords they were fighting with.

One of the fighters jumped high into the air and landed at least two body lengths from where he'd been standing, narrowly escaping a blow aimed at his shins. I gasped. A move like that wasn't humanly possible!

The fighters, wearing silvery, sleek body armor, didn't miss a beat as they bore down on each other with a series of quick blows. The movements blurred with their speed, the sound of the swords meeting deafening.

I gasped again when one of the opponents swung his sword in an arc and nearly took off the head of the other, who ducked and rolled just quickly enough to avoid decapitation. If this was a sparring session of some sort, it must have gotten out of hand. I looked up at Shannon anxiously. Surely someone should stop this!

Her face was a mask of calm, mixed perhaps with a bit of impatience. One of the fighters took advantage of an unsteady moment to get his opponent to one knee. He was just about to deliver a final blow when Shannon loudly cleared her throat. Both fighters froze. Shannon smiled coolly at them and said, "Logan, may I have a word with you?"

The fighter who had the advantage took a step back and lowered his sword.

"Sure, Shannon, just give me a sec," he said, not sounding nearly as out of breath as I thought he should. He reached an armored hand down to give his opponent a hand up. Not a bit of malice remained in their movements.

Logan shook the hand of his opponent, who was quite a bit bigger in both height and girth, and gave him a friendly pat on the back. They said something to each other I couldn't make out and chuckled before parting. The other guy gave Shannon a wave and a nod before pushing through a different set of doors.

As Logan moved toward us, his armor began to evaporate. First, his shin and shoe guards melted into the air, revealing brown sandals and dark jeans. Then the metal covering his arms and hands disappeared, followed by his breastplate, uncovering a T-shirt that read “Hunters Rule, Demons Drool.” He was leaner than the guys back in the break room, but still muscular. Last, his helmet evaporated. He looked younger than I expected . . . perhaps only a few years older than me. But who knew if age really meant anything here.

I shifted my weight and craned my neck to the left, trying to make sense of where his armor had just gone, peering around him as if it might magically appear somewhere behind him.

I was still gaping when he stopped a few feet short of Shannon and me. “Hey Shannon, what’s up?”

He glanced my way with only a mildly curious look. I wasn’t certain if I should be offended or relieved.

“Actually, I’ve brought you a new trainee.”

Logan tilted his chin up to scan the area behind us. I turned my head as well to see who he was looking at.

“Oh yeah, that’s great! Where is he?”

Shannon gave me a firm prod. Unprepared for the push and still gaping at Logan, I stumbled forward.

“Here *she* is,” Shannon said with a smile.

Logan’s eyes opened wider, and this time he *really* looked at me. He had dark blond hair, on the longer side and tousled, with wild highlights throughout, the type you

get from too much time spent in the water and sun. His eyes started at my feet and slowly moved up my body until they locked with mine. Under the scrutiny, I registered that his eyes were a deep cobalt blue. It reminded me of the color of the ocean on a sunny day. The intensity of his stare embarrassed me. I felt heat rise to my face but was trapped in his gaze. I felt judged.

Without releasing my eyes, he addressed Shannon. His words came out deliberately, with an icy edge.

“You have got to be kidding me.”

His tone sent a chill down my spine, which actually helped combat the warming of my cheeks. That was the final straw.

I broke his stare and pivoted on my heel. I’d had enough of all of this. Muttering to myself about how crazy this all was, I marched purposefully toward the door. I didn’t care if there were a zillion muscle dudes on the other side, I just wanted out.

Before my fourth step, Shannon was in front of me. In fact, she appeared so quickly I walked right into her, bounced off, and landed on my butt. Dang, how’d she get there so fast? She appeared to be glowing but was no longer smiling. She looked over my head at Logan.

“You know we don’t make mistakes about these things. There is a reason for this.”

“She’ll be eaten alive out there. Just look at her, Shannon.”

Shannon glanced at me, sitting there on my butt, before looking back up at Logan. A shadow of doubt crossed her face but was gone almost as quickly as it had appeared. Eaten alive. How was that even possible when you were already dead?

“Logan, it is what it is. You’ve been chosen as her mentor. You need to train her as you would anyone else.”

Neither of them spoke. I looked back and forth between the two. Then Logan asked with slightly narrowed eyes, “Is this because of what happened?”

Shannon’s features softened perceptibly.

“No, Logan, this isn’t some sort of punishment. You know things don’t work like that here.” Her voice was quiet but still strong when she continued, “What do you think they said about Romona when she first joined?”

Logan let out a deep sigh. There seemed to be some silent communication, a faceoff, going on between those two. Shannon must have won, because after a few minutes her calm, cool smile returned.

“Thank you, Logan. I’ll leave her with you now. You know what to do.”

The words sunk in fast as she turned to go. “Wh-what?” I stuttered. I scrambled up to stop her, but in my rush I lost my footing again and ended up half-running, half-crawling after her. When the door shut behind her, it occurred to me how pathetic I must look. I got fully to my feet and stared at the door.

Indecision about whether to run after her or turn around and face my fate kept me rooted in place. I was equally torn between wanting to shout at someone or break down crying. What in the world was going on? Whatever I might have thought the afterlife would look like, it surely wasn’t this.

I took a deep breath to steady myself. There was no use getting too upset until I found out what sort of job I had been assigned to anyway. Could it really be that bad?

So far, Logan hadn't made any attempt to talk to me. For all I knew, he wasn't even still there. I squeezed my eyes shut and took another deep breath. When I opened them, I turned to face him.

Logan was exactly where he had been when I attempted to make my grand exit. I assumed he was either giving me time or didn't know what to say, so I took control of the moment. At the very least, I needed to try to pull back some of the dignity I'd already lost.

I plopped my hands on my hips and let out a breath. "Okay, so will you at least tell me what exactly it is that we do?"

Logan looked me straight in the eyes and said, "We kill demons."

I saw his eyes, heard the words, and then everything went black.