

The Gates of Heaven and Hell

By Ashton Saylor

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You are Katie Munroe, seventeen and bored. You have two parents who are still together and seem happy—when they're not complaining about the economy or your grades. You have a little sister named Nikki, who's not good for much except getting into your stuff and looking adorable when your parents come to see what's wrong. You don't have many friends, just Adam Davenaugh, and he's only friends with you because you've known him since you were kids. He's an athlete and a bookworm; he's tall, brilliant and good-looking, and you're waiting for the day he realizes he's too good for you. You live in the small town of West Creekside and you spend your days at West Creekside High, where nothing ever happens.

Until you developed superpowers.

Well, not like flying around and lifting buildings, just... seeing things you hadn't before. Being able to do things you couldn't before. Small things, subtle things. Things no one noticed except you. And the dreams... every night you woke up with intense, breath-taking dreams.

It wasn't long after that you started to get the feeling you were being watched. Simply going outside could make the hairs on the back of your neck stand up. You never saw anyone, not directly, but you could *feel* a presence. You didn't tell anyone, not even Adam.

You knew what happens to people who say they see the kinds of things you see. People who admit they can do the things you can do. You didn't want to be stamped crazy and sent away.

So you kept it a secret. You told yourself it would go away soon.

Rules

For the purposes of this story, you must keep track of a few pieces of information. Unlike a normal book, your choices may affect the outcome of events. In order to keep track of the consequences of your choices, please get a pencil and paper, or a text file, something to record information on.

Start with recording the following items (the ones in bold):

Life Points: 6

Katie Munroe has 6 Life Points. If all of these are lost, she falls unconscious. A rating of 6 is considered to be fully healthy and so nothing can raise her total above 6; if something would, simply stop at 6.

Spirit Points: 6

Katie Munroe has 6 Spirit Points. These represent her energy, determination and mental well being. If all of them are lost, she collapses from exhaustion. A rating of 6 is considered to be fully rested and mentally re-charged, and so nothing can raise this total above 6; if something would, simply stop at 6.

Psychic Powers

Over the last few months, Katie has developed some unusual psychic powers. Please choose her powers by picking two of the following five powers listed.

Telemetry : Computers tend to malfunction when you're around. Even microwaves and TV's start acting funny. Before long, you learned you could control it. Turn on or off the TV without getting up. It got weird when your mom found you working on your paper while lying in bed. Fortunately, she thought you were just slacking off.

Telemetry gives Katie the ability to manipulate computers and other electronic devices from a distance.

Psychometry : It first happened when you saw a boy in front of you drop a note. You picked it up, but as soon as your fingers brushed the paper, you knew what it said. Not the words, specifically, but the emotion—and the girl it was for. You hurried and gave it back to him, but you couldn't explain why you were blushing.

Psychometry gives Katie the ability to read emotions and memories off of objects that she touches, especially objects that are or were important to someone.

Psychokinesis : You are a teenage poltergeist! You feel a little like you're cheating when you open drawers and slam doors without even touching them, but it sure is convenient. So far, you've kept it private, but you're debating with yourself the ethics of using it—just a little—at your next basketball game.

Psychokinesis, also called 'mind over matter' gives Katie the ability to manipulate physical objects without touching them.

The Sight: You went to one of those psychic aura reading things a few months ago, and got your palm read and stuff, and the lady taught you how to see auras for yourself. Only, you could really see them. Even after you left, the next day, the next week, you could still see them. After a while, you just started pretending you didn't so that your friends would stop giving you weird looks.

The Sight allows Katie to see into the Astral Plane, perceiving beings who aren't there and seeing people's auras. It can reveal information that would otherwise be hidden.

Healing: About a month ago you cut yourself chopping vegetables, but the wound healed while you watched. You were surprised at first, and had trouble explaining to your mom why you cried, 'ouch,' but since then, you've come to enjoy it. Even better, it works on other people too! Nikki has far less to fear from skinned knees with you around.

Healing gives Katie the ability to rapidly heal both herself and others by touching the wound with her hands.

When you are ready, begin reading with Chapter 1.

Chapter 1

It's a rare, stormy day in West Creekside. You're walking to school, eyeing the clouds, hoping you can make it before the sky opens up. So far it's a dry storm, but you can feel the electricity in the air. You know it will be coming soon.

The streets are completely empty, but that's to be expected with a storm moving in. The way the clouds blot out the sun, it almost looks more like evening than morning. You pick up your pace, glancing nervously at the sky.

Rounding the corner of Main Street and School Street, you nearly bump into Adam. He's just standing there, staring up. He looks so tall against the sky. When he looks down, his face is cast in shadow, but you think you see a smile there. He says, "Hi Katie. Are you ready?"

"Ready for what?" you ask, but he's already walking on.

You hurry onward, following him onto school grounds. The schoolyard is completely empty. Your stomach clenches as you realize you must be late! Grabbing tighter to your bag, you run ahead into the main hallway.

Empty.

You hesitate. This doesn't look right. Then it hits you—everyone must be in class already. You must be later than you realized!

You turn to say goodbye to Adam, but you can't find him. He must have turned away already. There's no time to lose. You break into a run, careening around corners toward your classroom. Your heels click loudly on the floors of the long, empty hallways. In the silence, it seems to you that the clicking of your heels becomes a sound bigger than you, bigger even than the school, the ticking of a great clock, counting down as it strikes the time with heavy bell-notes.

You burst into your classroom. Empty.

Is it Saturday? Have you gotten confused somehow?

Then you notice a single person in the room. A hunched figure by the teacher's desk. She's leaning down so that her hair falls over her face. You carefully walk closer, trying to think up excuses, but your brain simply races uselessly in circles. What are you even trying to excuse yourself for? What day is it? The ticking gives you a headache as you get closer.

You approach your teacher, but you still can't see her face. She doesn't look up. She just stays hunched over the desk, turned away from you, seeming to be nothing but hair. You clear your throat. The heavy ticking sound reverberates through the school now, so loud it hurts your ears.

The hunched figure begins to shake, then you hear low laughter. It turns toward you, but where you should see a face, you just see bright, bright light.

A deep, rich woman's voice asks, "Are you ready?"

The light of her face blinds you.

Turn to Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

You wake with a start, sitting bolt upright in bed. A cold sweat clams up your arms and cheeks. Your heart racing, you catch your breath, running your fingers through your hair.

Just a dream.

A scream jars you, sending your already-pounding heart into overdrive. Before you know it, you've leapt from bed, backing away from the door, holding your breath. For a moment you think you're still dreaming, but you bump into your nightstand, nearly knocking it over. You're not this clumsy in your dreams.

Then you hear the scream again. A crash from downstairs.

Nikki. That's Nikki's voice.

"Nikki? Mom? Dad?" You shout, running to the door. You grab a jacket lying by the door and throw it over your shoulders while you pound down the stairs. Time seems to stretch out as you stumble and leap down the stairs. At last you round the last corner into the living room to find—

Blood.

Blood everywhere.

Oh god. You turn back into the hallway and retch. The smell of it, salty and raw, fills your senses.

Please let this be a dream. Please let this be a dream.

You turn back into the room. Two figures. Dad's in his chair. The one on the floor must be... yes, that's her hair. You close your eyes. You've seen enough.

Nikki.

You cross the living room trying not to look where you're going. Trying to not think. You come into the side hallway and push open her door. Nikki's room is clean and empty.

Empty. Nikki's gone. Her bed is mussed and the windows are wide open, white curtains drifting in the breeze. A few feathers drift in the window.

A strange scabbling sound makes you uncomfortable. It sounds as if a thousand rats are scratching at the walls and the floorboards. You've been hearing it a few moments now, but only now have you realized it. It's coming closer.

Turn to Chapter 13 if you go to the window.

Turn to Chapter 41 if you investigate your sister's bed.

Turn to Chapter 39 if you run away.

Chapter 3

"No matter," the old man says, "Come, pray with me." He lights several candles around the room, then pushes aside a few large rugs leaning against a wall to reveal a huge, lifelike statue of Jesus Christ on the cross.

"Lay your sins and your hopes before God. Ask for His guidance. He can help you more than I can." With that, the old man kneels before the makeshift altar and begins to mumble in prayer.

The incense and candle smoke thickens in the room, drowning you. The droning of the old man's voice carries you away from yourself. Images of your parents flash before your eyes. You feel a sensation of being lifted above yourself, or falling into the void that is the world. Your words start as a whisper and become a torrent, a lifeline. You lose yourself in prayer.

Turn to Chapter 43.

Chapter 4

Where you see with your normal eyes a ragtag teenage girl, when you open your other eyes you see a pool of shadow in the shape of a woman. Red gleams delineate her eyes and mouth, eager and lascivious. The curves of her body are accentuated, giving her a motherly appearance, and huge bat-like wings extend from her back, each larger than herself.

Turn back to the chapter you came from.

Chapter 5

Together, the three of you go out from the church into the dark day. The clouds hang heavy over the city, and the rain feels even closer now. The few people you see out huddle in jackets whipped by the wind, looking neither up nor sideways but hurrying to their destination.

Lailah leads you out into an open patch of grass, then holds out her arms to you and Kezef, saying "Hold on."

Kezef cheerfully jumps onto her leg, holding her tightly with both arms and his legs. Following his example, you crouch under her arm and wrap your arms securely around her. She feels warm, and smells of the storm.

She raises her face to the sky and begins to murmur. The sound grows around you like a rumbling beneath the earth, but none of the people around you seem to hear it. (If you have The Sight and want to look at Lailah with it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 4, then come back here.)

Suddenly little voids rip in the sky, like dozens of tears in reality. Through the openings, you think you can see a starry night sky, as though all the clouds and light had been completely swallowed by darkness, leaving only the brilliance of the Milky Way. Through the holes crawl a host of misshapen, winged horrors, each more disgusting than the last. Their faces are eyeless sockets and shapeless noses, with little mouths that gape in a constant silent scream at the horror of their own existence. Their bodies are skinless, red sinew and white bone exposed to the air.

They flex large, batlike wings as they come into this world and then fly off their perches in the tears of reality to come hover around the three of you, their wings blotting out the sky. One by one, each grabs onto a part of Lailah and lifts, until all three of you are carried into the sky.

"They are yours?" you ask in astonishment as the ground grows farther away beneath you. None of the people on the street even look up.

"Once, I could create beautiful children," Lailah says, an undercurrent of ancient bitterness in her voice.

The flapping continues all around you, making it too loud to talk easily. Before long you see the school coming into view ahead. The little monstrosities bring you to land just in front of the main doors. After setting you gently down, they flap back off into the sky, where they crawl back out of new holes in reality that close behind them seamlessly.

"Why can't they be seen?" You ask.

"We're not completely here. Not yet. The Gate of Hell stands ajar because there is no Keeper. But not until the Keeper unlocks them will we be able to bring out power fully to bear."

"Why are we here?"

Lailah says, "This is a place of power. This is where it must be done, so this is where they will have taken your sister."

Kezef pounces ahead and listens at the doors. He looks up and says softly, "I think I hear something!"

You come up next to him while he carefully opens the door slightly. Looking in, you see the main hall of the school. On the right are several doors and windows leading into the school office. On the left is a long glass display case showing sporting awards and old yearbooks. In the middle of the room stands a tall, beautiful woman. She wears a business-suit and glasses, and her long blond hair is pulled back into a severe bun. She is talking to a man who kneels before her, golden locks of hair obscuring his face.

"What do you mean, you cannot find her?" The woman asks impatiently. The answer is muffled, but the answering voice is deep and familiar.

"You assured me that she would follow her sister here. What has gone wrong?"

At that, Lailah throws open the doors and walks in purposefully, saying, "Where is the girl?"

The blond woman's eyes narrow, and she stands a little more firmly. She says, "It was a mistake to come here, spawn of Hell."

"I may not be in God's graces," Lailah says, "But at least I don't kidnap little girls. At least I didn't kill Katie's parents."

The man kneeling stands up and turns toward you. Adam.

You stare at Adam's face, shocked. Finally, you stammer, "Adam? Did you...?"

Adam looks at you, his familiar, kindly features subdued. He nods, not meeting your eyes.

The woman behind him says, "It would be against our Law to lie. Your parents were possessed by minor demons. Hell intended to influence you through them, and that could not be allowed."

"Callous bitch," Leilah spits, "Give her back!"

"We cannot do that. Not yet."

"What do you mean, not yet?" You ask. You walk out into the middle of the room. The blond woman sizes you up, then says, "You must be Katie Munroe. I am Alexis Celestine. I believe I know you."

"I don't know you, and I don't want to. I want my sister back."

The woman walks slowly toward you, saying, "Do you know who you keep company with? Those two are hellspawn. Demons who would flood the world with a tide of evil that would devour all humanity."

"I don't care. You killed my parents."

Alexis steps right up to you and touches your cheek, looking into your eyes. Her eyes are light grey behind the glasses, the color of the clouds, or the ocean on a stormy day. Stray strands of her blond hair form a halo around her head, illuminated from behind by the overhead lighting. (If you have The Sight and wish to use it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 16, then come back here.)

"Once you were one of us," Alexis says, "You were one of the best and brightest. Wherever there was evil, you were at the forefront of the battle, raising the standard for us all to follow. To see you brought so low..." She shakes her head, then continues, "But you fell. You forsook Heaven, and God, and all that is right.

"But it's not too late, child. It's never too late to come back into God's good graces. Join us. Accept forgiveness, and return to your family." Alexis' voice weaves a spell that draws you in. As she speaks, you feel her words tugging at ancient, familiar memories. You remember being that angel, fighting the glorious fight. You remember encouraging others, spurring them onward toward courage and brilliance.

And you remember it all tumbling down around your ears.

"Don't listen to her," Lailah says in her dark, sultry voice, but you can hear a note of fear underneath. She continues, "There's a reason you left their side, and it wasn't for the perks of being an outcast! They didn't care about you, and they still don't. All they care about is the cause, and they don't care who gets hurt along the way."

Alexis responds in cold, silky tones, "Is it not selfish to place oneself above the destiny of an entire species? What right do any one of us have to be cared about more than the whole of us?"

"Save it, you stuck-up old hag. Katie's not going to listen to you."

Alexis turns back to you and holds out her hand, glowing with golden power. She says, "Return to us. There will be sacrifices, but all will be made right."

You glance over; Adam is watching you with his heart in his eyes. You see that Kezef has snuck around behind Adam, a malicious grin on his face.

Turn to Chapter 19 if you take Alexis' hand and accept forgiveness.

Turn to Chapter 7 if you spit at Alexis and say, "I don't need to listen to this. I don't care what you say. You still killed my parents and kidnapped my sister."

Turn to Chapter 10 to turn away and say, "You know what? I'm sick of all of you. Take your stupid war and go have it somewhere else. Just leave me and my sister alone!"

Chapter 6

Alexis nods, saying, "Ultimately, there is only one measure of correct behavior. The greatest good for the greatest number."

"Yes," you say, "I think that's right. It's not always easy, but it's the best way to tell good from evil."

Alexis walks up to you and puts her hand on your cheek. She is taller than you, and she seems to glow with power, standing over you. You fall to your knees, awed by her. (If you have The Sight and would like to use it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 16 now, then return here afterward.)

She leans over and strokes your cheek, brushing your hair back over your ear, and smiles. She says, "In the early days, before humans were even born, you were a glorious angel. When some of our brethren grew rebellious, you were one of those who led the charge against them. As the war waged on, you were always at the forefront of the fight, burning brightly.

"Eventually, the time came when you and your mate were selected to carry out a mission that only you could succeed at, but which would surely be fatal. As expected, your mate perished, but you... instead of choosing death, you joined the enemy. It was a shame for us all."

You lower your face, saying, "I'm sorry..."

Gently, she says, "The beauty of God's grace is that there is always room for forgiveness. Come back to us! It's not too late to atone for the mistakes of the past!"

"Yes. Yes! I will!" You cry out, tears streaming down your face. Alexis takes your hand and lifts you to your feet.

"Not so fast!" A voice rings out. You turn to see a young woman walking in purposefully, the main doors of the school swinging behind her. She has long, dark, lustrous hair and round cheeks, but the softness of her face is belied by a hard determination in her eyes. A young boy follows along behind her, hopping along eagerly.

"I am Lailah, Angel of Conception, and I will not allow you to seduce this woman with your lies." (If you have The Sight and wish to use it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 4, then return here to continue.)

Adam steps forward to block their way, saying, "You cannot interfere with this holy rite. The salvation of a soul is at hand!" Adam seems to grow taller as he moves, the lines of his body being encompassed with a golden light. He lifts his hands, and a faint, sword-shaped shimmer develops extending from his arms.

The boy leaps forward, his body extending grotesquely as he does so. His shoulder and arm swell to massive proportions and slam Adam, knocking your friend backward solidly. The boy grins and says, "I am Kezef, Angel of Destruction, and I won't let you mess with my sister."

The boy pounces toward Adam, parts of his body bulging to gorilla-like proportions. Adam springs to his feet and meets Kezef's charge headlong. Light and flames burst from their collision.

Lailah keeps walking, never taking her eyes off of you and Alexis. She says, in a voice rich with dark, sultry tones, "There is something you need to know, Katie. These two angels killed your parents."

Alexis' eyes flash dangerously as she says, "You would do well to know when not to interfere, follower of Lucifer."

"At least Lucifer cares for his followers. I wish I could say the same for you."

You cut in, "Is this true? Did you...?"

Alexis' eyes flick down to you and back up to Lailah. She says, "I cannot lie. But they were no longer what they seemed. They were possessed by minor demons. Hell was going to influence you through them. That could not be allowed."

"Adam...?" You whisper, looking over at him. With a great heave, he throws Kezef off of him and comes toward you. He kneels before you, his golden locks falling over porcelain skin. Tears stand in his eyes as he says, "I am so sorry, Katie. I never wanted to hurt you..."

"Listen to me," Alexis says, her eyes burning, "These two are demons. Fallen angels with wicked hearts and poisonous tongues. Now is your chance for redemption. Do not throw it away."

"Redemption?" Lailah spits, "More like slavery. Did you ever think that maybe you quit their side for a reason in the first place?"

Kezef limps back into view, rubbing a great scorch-mark on his arm. He carefully moves into position behind Adam, watching you and waiting.

Turn to Chapter 19 if you say, "I understand, Adam. You did what you had to do. I stand with the forces of Heaven now."

Turn to Chapter 7 if you say, "How could you do this? I don't care if they are demons. They're better than you."

Turn to Chapter 10 if you say, "This is ridiculous. I've had enough of you, all of you. Take your war elsewhere, just leave me out of it."

Chapter 7

Alexis' face twists with rage, and Leilah laughs, a long and low, melodic laugh. Adam says, "Katie... you're making a big mistake. Trust me."

"Shut up, Adam," you say softly, "I thought I could trust you. I don't care what your reasons were, you've been lying to me for as long as I've known you."

His face hardens, "I can't let you help them. They are evil."

"Oh, is that what they call disobedience up there?" Lailah asks. Kezef giggles and says, "You should try it sometime. It's a lot more fun!"

Suddenly Alexis vanishes in a flash of light and re-appears behind Lailah in her full angelic glory. Golden armor surrounds her, and the severe bun has been replaced by golden locks of hair flowing around her head. She raises a golden sword and swoops in on Lailah from behind.

"NOOO!" Kezef shouts, jumping between the two of them.

The sword strikes Kezef through his torso, spilling black blood across the floor of the hall. Lailah gasps, and then she cries out in rage and sorrow. She snarls, "How dare you... How DARE YOU!"

Lailah lifts her arms and shadows crawl from her body, seeping out of her arms and legs, out from the shadow cast by her on the floor. Every shadow in the building seems to twist to life, screaming in the agony of ripping itself free from the pins that hold it to the wall or floor. Several of them grasp at Alexis, tearing the sword from her grasp, ripping her armor off of her.

Adam charges the shadows, slashing at them uselessly. He shouts, "Katie! Help me!"

"No," you say softly.

Lailah scowls in unadulterated hatred, an aura of power growing around her. She whispers, "Darkness," and more shadows burst from the walls and ceiling. She whispers, "Pain," and rips in the very fabric of the universe appear all around you. Creatures crawl through, of all shapes and sizes, skinless horrors with wings or fangs or many pairs of legs, shrieking with delight. Lailah's eyes are rolling back in her head. Her body shakes with the power coursing through her.

Adam tries to cut his way through the creatures manifesting before them, but they reappear faster than he can cut them down. At last he manages to cut his way to Alexis, who he grabs, and then the two of them vanish in a puff of golden smoke.

Lailah collapses, spent. Her creatures swarm around her. Their hideous, toothy maws open to lick her her. The spidery shadow beings work themselves under her thin frame, trying to lift her.

"Kezef," she whispers, using the last of her strength to crawl to him. You rush over; the monstrosities part to let you through, skinless horrors panting and staring and writhing at you. You lift Lailah's arm over your shoulder and help her to Kezef.

He's laying on the ground, thick, black blood spilling from a terrible wound in his body. He stirs and opens his eyes, then grins weakly and says, "Heya sis', didn't think I made it did you?"

She laughs quietly and collapses next to him, holding him close. She asks, "Are you all right?"

"I think so," he says, "I just need a minute."

"We may not have it," Lailah says, shaking her head to try and revitalize herself. She pulls herself to her feet, helping Kezef stand up too, and says, "Come on, Katie. It's time to put your money where your mouth is and help us out."

"What do you mean?"

Lailah starts walking slowly down the hall, her and Kezef helping each other along. You follow closely, listening as Lailah says, "You've got to help us help you. You think they're going to just let us walk out of here with your sister? They're off gathering reinforcements now, I guarantee you. There's only one way to make sure we have the power to win this fight, and you're the only one who can do it."

"I don't understand..." You say. Lailah leads you around the corner into the wing where the classrooms are.

"We need to summon friends, and there's only one way to bring them through the Gate. You've got to kill someone."

"What!?" You blurt out.

"Come on! We're the bad guys, didn't you notice? It's not 'good,' it's not 'nice,' it's just *right*. It won't be pretty, but what's more important, being 'good' or saving your sister?"

"I just didn't think..."

"I've got someone in mind. Should be fun. You know your math teacher? The one you hate?"

"Mr. Harris? How did you know I hate him?"

She grins, "We've had our eye on you a while. You used to be part of the gang, you know? We take an interest in our own. I tell you, every time he picks that snotty blond in front instead of you to answer a question that you know the answer to, I'm just about ready to kill him for you."

Your mind spins, but you follow Lailah and Kezef. They both seem to be growing stronger by the second, their bodies and energies re-knitting themselves rapidly.

"In here," Lailah says, gesturing into your math classroom. Looking in through the window in the door, you see Mr. Harris sifting through some papers, blissfully unaware of the angelic battle that's been raging just down the hall.

"How do I kill him?" you ask.

"Are you kidding? Any way you like. Brain him with a chair. Knock him over and stomp his head into the ground. Stab his jugular with the letter opener. What, do you need us to hold him down for you?"

"Wait," a new voice says. You look over to see a man standing not far away in the hallway. He's a medium sized man, but with a muscular build. His hair is blond and close-cropped; a military haircut. You recognize him as the man from the van, this morning.

Lailah rolls her eyes, "Oh great, another goody-two-shoes." She carefully sets Kezef down and stands squarely, facing him. You can feel power gathering around her, the tension of a storm about to break.

"I'm not here to fight, demon," the man says in a strong, clipped voice, "I just want to talk."

"We're not interested in what you have to say," Lailah rolls her voice.

"She might be." He looks at you and says, "Hear me out, just for a moment. These demons haven't told you everything."

"What are you saying? Who are you?" You ask, eyeing Lailah and Kezef and stepping slightly farther away from them. They snarl, but neither moves to attack the man.

"My name's Eric. I'm just a guy who wants to make sure you know the whole story before you choose what you're getting into."

"Shut up! Leave us alone!" Kezef shouts.

"Katie," Eric says, "You're the Keeper. After the old one died, you were chosen. You have the soul of an angel and a human in the same body, and that's what it takes. One part divine, one part mortal. You've already come into your power, you just don't know how to use it yet.

"What that means is that it's your job to guard the Gates of Heaven and Hell in order to keep humans free from the wars of the angels. If you kill a mortal, you will unlock one of the Gates. Once that's done, it can never be undone."

"Why should I listen to you?" You ask.

He shrugs, "You don't have to. I just thought I'd let you know."

"He's lying," Lailah spits, "He's just the same as the rest of them. Just wants to split us up, keep you from calling in our friends. Come on, Katie, just get it over with. You've never liked that math teacher anyway. It's him or your sister, take your pick."

(If you have The Sight and wish to use it on Eric, then mark this chapter, turn to Chapter 40, and then come back here.)

Turn to Chapter 20 if you refuse to kill the math teacher.

Turn to Chapter 32 if you agree to kill the math teacher.

Chapter 8

A smile comes into the young woman's eyes as she says, "Of course not! Who are those unnamed thousands who would benefit from a cure for cancer? Why should you care about them? What did they ever do for you?"

"Well, of course I would cure cancer, if I could," you stipulate, "I just don't think it would be right to kill my best friend." A memory of Adam flashes unbidden into your mind, and you shudder, trying not to imagine torturing him to death.

Lailah says, "Friendship is all that matters in this world. Love. Loyalty. Other people don't care about me. Why should I care about them? But me and Kezef, and the rest of us... without each other, we would be lost."

You nod thoughtfully.

Lailah leans in, her dark hair falling across her shoulder, "And that's why we're here. For you, old friend." She puts her hand gently on yours, saying, "You don't remember, but you will. You were so much more, once." Her fingers feel hot to the touch, but pleasant, as they slowly twine around your own.

"What are you talking about?" you ask.

"I'm talking about passion, trust... I'm talking about love." Her eyes meet yours, deep dark pools that hold a tempting promise. You feel like you are falling in.

"You were one of them once. One of the legions. But they betrayed you. They sent you and your man to your deaths. He died, but you—you rebelled. You came to us."

Kezef sniffs, tearing up, and rushes over to your side, throwing his arms around you. He cries, "You saved my life! I'm so glad to have you back!"

You put your arm around him instinctively, feeling a strange rush of warmth, even recognition. You can't remember details, but the sense of familiarity, of trust and companionship, is so strong that it nearly gives you vertigo.

"They are back," Lailah whispers sharply, "The ones who sent you to your death, who betrayed you. This time, they have killed your parents and kidnapped your sister."

"What?" You burst out, "Who is it? Where are they?"

"The angels..." Lailah's eyes flash with hatred, "They wish to move into this world and enslave all humanity into the service of their God."

"Why my parents?" Your heart clenches, and tears sting your eyes.

"They don't care who gets hurt along the way, as long as it's for the greater good. But your sister is still alive. There may still be time to save her."

"Where is she? I have to get to her!"

"You can. You will. But you have to trust us."

"You'll help me?"

Lailah's smile turns dangerous. She purrs, "It won't be nice. It won't be pretty. It won't be 'good.' But if you're willing to do what needs to be done, you can get your sister back alive. I promise."

Turn to Chapter 5.

Chapter 9

You scramble to your feet just in time, as an explosion rocks the ground where you just were. (Lose 2 Life Points from being scorched.) You bolt for the door, but suddenly Adam stands in front of you, blocking your way.

He looks at your neck and quietly says, "I'm sorry." His face is an impassive wall of stone.

"You bastard..." you whisper.

Alexis' voice rings out, "That's enough, Adam. Finish it."

Adam holds out his hand, still not meeting your eyes, and a long golden sword forms from the palm of his hand. He holds it up, poised to strike.

He takes a breath, his eyes wavering, and then a voice rings out, "Not so fast!"

Turn to Chapter 34.

Chapter 10

"Look at you, all of you. What are you doing here? This isn't your place. This isn't your home. This is earth. This is for humans, not freaks and angels. Isn't there someone who's supposed to be keeping the likes of you out of here?"

"There is. You're her." A new voice says. You look over to see a medium-sized man with military-cut, blond hair. You recognize the man from the van earlier this morning.

"Who are you?" you ask.

He shrugs, "My name's Eric."

"Where the hell did you come from?"

"I've just been watching. See, you're the Keeper. That's what no one's told you yet. But you just figured it out, so now I can talk about it."

"I'm the Keeper?"

He nods, "Since birth. It has to be the joining of a human and angelic soul. Someone who sits on the divide of both worlds. You've had the power all along, you just don't know how to use it yet."

Alexis scowls, "I should have known you would come back to betray us. I should have known as soon as you left Heaven."

"I only left Heaven once the old man did. You should have paid attention. You're running on tradition and superstition now. Whatever was good in Heaven left with him long ago. Me? I think it's here now."

"And I think you're dead meat," Lailah says, circling around Eric with a prowling gait, while Alexis circles around him from the other side.

"Uh... a little help here?" Eric asks, "You can banish any of us. Just try. Quickly, please?"

"Sure, umm... Go away!" You shout at Alexis. She glares at you, then a startled look comes over her face, and she begins to glow. The light suddenly pops brightly and when it's gone, so is she. All that remains are a few golden motes drifting slowly to the ground.

"Hey, I like that trick!" Leilah says, "Do it again!" She leers at Adam expectantly.

"Sure. Get out of here!" You point at her. She glares at you indignantly, then darkness yawns and you hear a fragment of a thousand lost wails. There's a little popping sound and then darkness, wail and demoness are all gone in a puff of black smoke.

"Hey! What did you do to Lailah! I used to like you! I thought we were friends!" Kezef shouts. You glance at him and say, "Go on, you too." He, vanishes in a puff of smoke and brimstone.

You look over at Adam. He lets his sword fade away, but flexes his wings and smiles. A strange emotion comes over your heart. You walk over to him and hold out your hand. He takes it and smiles a little sadly.

"I'm sorry," you whisper. He nods and says, "Me too. It was good for a while." You give him one last hug, smelling again that delightful hint of a warm, summer day. Then you give him a peck on the cheek, touch his face, and whisper, "Go home."

Light wells from his skin, becoming so bright it's almost blinding. You are forced to blink, and when you open your eyes again, he's gone. All that remains are a few feathers, drifting around you.

"He went home on his own, before you could force him out," Eric says. His voice sounds drier now, quieter. You look around the room. Aside from the broken glass display case, nothing looks out of the ordinary. There is no sign that a battle of celestial proportions just took place here. It looks like a normal school hallway, marred only by some teenage vandals.

"Your sister is on the roof," Eric says, "At least, that's where the angels left her, last time I checked."

You look over at him. (If you have The Sight and want to use it, mark this spot and turn to 40 now, then turn back here to continue.)

"Why are you doing this?" you ask. He looks down at his feet, then says, "I gave up a lot when I left Heaven. I just couldn't buy into the system anymore. But I didn't like the other option any better. So I made my own.

"It cost me. There's not much I can do these days, one guy against the world. But when I saw you, I thought maybe I could at least offer some advice.

“By the way, there's some stairs up to the roof just around the corner over there.”

“Thank you,” you say. He looks a little uncomfortable and says gruffly, “Don't mention it.”

You smile and turn toward the stairs. Thinking of Nikki, you take the stairs two at a time and burst out onto the roof.

“Over there,” Eric says. Looking where he's pointing, you see a small figure huddled against a low wall, tied to some fixture on the roof.

Turn to Chapter 37.

Chapter 11

You take one glance at the open van door and the shadowy man inside and just keep on running. A voice calls after you, “Hey!” Then the van swerves away and pulls down a side street, leaving you behind. The dogs are almost on top of you, and after only a few steps, you realize you just don't have it in you to run anymore.

Looking around the street, you can see the no one else seems alarmed by the dogs. Steeling yourself, you turn to face them and whisper, “You're not real. You're not real.”

The horrific beasts howl in excitement as they draw closer, leaping past each other in their eagerness to get to you. You can see every bloody sinew tense and pull in their shoulders, their red rimmed eyes gleaming with bloodlust. Their teeth yawn before you.

You close your eyes.

A heavy weight slams into you, knocking the breath out of you. Then another, and another. They fall upon you, their teeth sinking into your arms and legs. A howl of victory.

You try to scream, but teeth close on your throat, crushing the air out of you—but for some reason, not ripping your throat out. You struggle helplessly, panic rising as you lose air. But there is nothing you can do.

The dog gives a final shake and you black out.

Turn to Chapter 43

Chapter 12

Adam puts his arm around you in a friendly way as you walk. You hesitate, then shyly slip your arm around his waist. After a moment, Adam says softly, “I'm glad you're here with me. You're doing the right thing.”

“Well, I'm glad you're here with me, Adam. I knew I could count on you.” You look up at him. He doesn't meet your gaze, but looks back down at his feet.

It's not long before you get to the main doors of the school. The two huge wooden doors swing heavily open when Adam pushes them. Inside, you see the cavernous main hall of the school.

On the right are doors to the offices, and on the left is a long glass case showcasing sporting awards and past yearbooks.

At the end of a hall stands a tall woman in a business suit. She has sharp, stylish glasses and long, blond hair that is pulled back in a severe bun.

Adam bows to the woman, then pushes you forward, saying, "Alexis, I have brought you Katie Munroe."

"Adam, what's going on?" you whisper.

"Go to her," he whispers back, "She can tell you everything you need to know."

You hesitantly approach the blond woman, feeling very small in the huge entry hall. Every angle of this woman, the straight line of her back, the square of her perfectly postured shoulders, the thin lips and even the sharp angle of her eyebrows, speaks of severe, uncompromising standards. She watches you approach, judging you by those standards.

"I am Alexis Celestine. What do you want?" The woman asks, her eyes clicking over you.

"I am Katie Munroe. I want to find my sister," you say. You find yourself flushing and shifting from foot to foot, looking anywhere except at her.

"I know where she is," the woman nods slowly.

Your breath catches; you say, "Will you tell me?"

"Do you believe in God, Katie Munroe?"

"Uh... I guess so?" You answer, flustered, "What does this have to do with anything?"

"Everything." The woman walks up to you, her heels clicking loudly in the empty school building. She continues, "I need to know if you are ready."

"Yes," you answer, steeling yourself. You force yourself to look up to meet her eye, "Whatever it is. I am ready for it."

She nods once, slightly, but you sense approval. She asks, "And will you sacrifice? How much are you personally willing to give up?"

You lower your head, wanting to answer honestly. After a moment, you look back up and say, "I will give up whatever I need to."

"Even a life? If it took one person's life to bring about eternal life for everyone, would you do it?"

Turn to Chapter 29 to answer, "No."

Turn to Chapter 6 to answer, "Yes."

Chapter 13

You race to the window, but the alley outside is empty and undisturbed. The sky above is cloudy. A storm is brewing, but the rain hasn't fallen yet. The wind billows Nikki's curtains. You brush them aside and notice a feather, drifting down toward you. You catch it in your hand. It looks like a dove feather, white and soft. (Write down that you have a white feather, if you wish to keep it. If you have Psychometry, you may mark this spot and turn to Chapter 18 now, then come back here.)

Looking up from the feather, you scan the sky. Just as you are about to give up, you notice something in the distance. You see two winged figures, holding between them a third, smaller figure which struggles as it is carried. The three of them fly toward a break in the clouds, silhouetting them against the light.

"Nikki!" you shout.

Suddenly the scratching sound you heard earlier turns into a ripping sound. You turn around, startled, to see a dog-like creature clawing its way out of one wall. Another rips an opening in the floor and starts clambering up through it, snapping viciously. Through the openings, you catch a glimpse of what appears to be a starry, night sky.

Turn to Chapter 17 if you have Psychokinesis and want to use it.
Turn to Chapter 25 if you escape out the window.

Chapter 14

You take a deep breath and look at the sky. At last, it begins to rain. The patter of gentle raindrops strikes your face, running down your cheeks and pooling in your eyes. You look back down at Alexis and nod once.

She holds out her hand and produces a knife. It is not golden or glowing, a simple shaft of metal, earthly, mundane. You take it.

Walking over to Nikki, you see that she is not asleep, just huddled up. She sees you coming and cries out, "Katie! Katie over here!"

She jumps up and you run up and hug her, tears coming from your eyes, "Oh Nikki, I'm so glad to see you. I'm sorry, I'm so sorry..."

Nikki pulls away from you to look at your face and laughs, a laugh of pure simple delight. In that moment, Alexis freezes her. The angel reaches out her hand and touches the child's head, and the life fades from her features, leaving only the hint of her last laugh on her lips.

Alexis intones, "Jesus died for our sins. He was an innocent who gave hope to the hopeless through his sacrifice. Through the blood of innocence comes the salvation of mankind."

You grit your teeth, utter a prayer, and slash. It takes only a moment. The blade goes through easier than you thought, and in a moment her lifeblood is spilling onto the concrete roof. Her expression does not change. Good. She feels no pain.

As the blood pools beneath her, you hear the sound of trumpets ringing all around. You can hear everything clearly. Nikki's heartbeat grows so loudly it's like a great clock in the sky, ticking its last moments. The beat slows to a halt, and finally, the last sound echoes through the heavens.

The trumpets grow stronger and more melodic, their music filling the skies. The clouds part, rolling back to reveal a blinding light, through which the hosts of heaven march. Brilliant beings of glory and beauty file past, one after the other in an endless stream of heavenly splendour.

Alexis grabs you by the shoulder and gives you a hug, grinning openly, tears streaming down her face. She shouts, "You have done it! You have done it! No more pain and suffering and death for humanity! You have brought Heaven to Earth for all of time!"

Angels descend from the skies, surrounding the two of you as you laugh together. The two demons rise up from the skylight, scowling and red with blood, but angelic warriors surround them and cut them down in moments.

From where you stand, the golden hosts of heaven file through and spread across the globe, bringing the Glory of Heaven wherever they go.

The End.

Chapter 15

As the last of the people are disappearing onto the bus, you rush over to join the line, getting in just before the impatient bus-driver shuts the doors and swerves back into traffic. You fumble with getting cash from the wallet, trying to keep your balance. At last, you find a seat and relax into relative anonymity. The city goes by outside the window. You lean your forehead against the glass, staring at the world out there.

You get off the bus at a neighborhood off downtown, West Creekside's small immigrant community. You've never been to this part of town. The sky is heavy with clouds, but it doesn't seem to be any closer to raining. You wander down the streets, looking into shop windows. Most of the stores are closed.

A sign catches your eye: an image of the face of a clock etched into a hanging wooden sign that rocks in the wind. You check the address; it's correct. The window display has several ornate, old clocks showcased. The sign on the door says 'Closed,' but when you push on the door it opens, making a tiny ringing sound.

"Hello?" you ask. No answer. There is a heavy, musty smell in the air: brass polish and old leather, dust and stale incense. You decide you like it. Great stacks of gears and wheels and clock faces and hands tumble off of shelves that line the walls floor to ceiling. Enough clocks are running to create a persistent ticking and whirl of gadgets in motion. There's even an hourglass, filled with real sand, slowly pouring down on one table.

"Time is always short, yet humans while it away as though it were worthless," a thin old voice says from somewhere in the depths of the room. You turn, startled, but see nothing. Then you hear the voice continue, "Come on in. I was wondering when you'd arrive."

Heart pounding, you quietly make your way past display shelves to the back of the store, where you round a corner into a workroom lit by a single, smoky bulb. A small old man sits behind a worktable piled with esoteric tools and clocks in various states of disrepair, looking at something through a massive magnifying lens contraption. This smaller area is lit by one low, warm light over the workbench that paints the whole room in sepia tones.

After a second, you mutter, "I'm sorry, I think I've come to the wrong place."

"Oh? That all depends on what you are looking for," the old man looks up at you. He has a sweet, wizened face. Here the scent of incense is fresh and strong. It tickles your nose.

"I... don't know, I'm afraid." You hold up the card, your lips working, trying to form vague excuses. Before you find one, the old man says, "Ah, well if you don't know what you are looking for, how do you expect to find it?"

Turn to Chapter 35 if you say, "I'm looking for my sister."

Turn to Chapter 26 if you say, "I'm looking for the truth."

Chapter 16

As Alexis stands over you, you let the veils over your eyes drop away. You blink, and when you open your eyes again you see her true form, that of a brilliant angel shimmering with light and power. Her bun is a crown of light. Her hair is a halo of golden strands, glistening around her head. Her eyes glow with almost blinding brilliance. And her wings—the wings! Each is twice the size of her, the lines and feathers illuminated in white light. She is a vision of power and beauty.

Turn back to the chapter you came from.

Chapter 17

Gathering your rage, you slam at one of the demon-dogs with your mind. It squeals, flying backwards, and makes a painful crack as it hits the far wall. The other struggles free of the portal while you're busy, and another after that from a third opening.

You hop up onto the window and crouch there. Looking up, you wave your hand to fling back the next pair of devil-dogs, buying you some time to lower yourself out the window. You hit the ground running and bolt down the alley as fast as you can.

Lose 1 Spirit Point for using Psychokinesis, then turn to Chapter 21.

Chapter 18

The feather is light and soft in your hands, with smooth, evenly groomed bristles only lightly rustled by the wind. As you touch it, something about the feather reminds you of Adam. It's a comforting feeling. For a moment, you even smile.

Lose 1 Spirit Point for using Psychometry, then turn back to Chapter 13 and continue reading where you left off.

Chapter 19

The angel's smiles light up their faces. Adam simply glows, and even Alexis' eyes soften with pleasure and pride as you make your choice. Lailah snarls and says, "You'll come to regret this. Don't forget it."

Kezef pounces, roaring. His whole body swells to the size of a small tank, with massive, misshapen fists larger than sledgehammers. Adam turns just in time to see the fist hit his face. The blow slams him to the floor, where he slides halfway across the hall and slams into the glass display case, shattering it. Broken glass and awards tumble on to him.

Lailah moves closer, dropping to a low crouch. She raises her arms, and you hear the same chittering sound you heard in your home this morning, just before the hell-dogs showed up.

Alexis says, "Stay back, demons. She is under my protection now, and you cannot harm her."

A golden glow emerges from the rubble beneath the broken display case, and Adam rises from beneath it, shouldering off the debris. A sword of light forms in his hand, and you can see the outline of wings of light stretching from his back. His face is scratched and cut, but he looks at you and smiles.

Alexis barks, "Adam, hold them off! Buy us enough time to do what must be done."

Adam nods, then in a flash of light he leaps across the room to Lailah. A spray of blood rises where he slashes her with his sword, and her mutterings turn to screams as she falls back. The chittering, scratching sound at the edge of reality fades.

The misshapen boy screams, "Don't you touch her!" and leaps forward, massive arms raised.

"Come on!" Alexis tugs at you. You take her hand and she wraps you in your arms. You feel a protective warmth surround you, and Alexis' wings unfold, great wings of light and feathers that lift you and she up and up and up, toward the skylight. You burst straight through the skylight in a shower of broken glass, coming out underneath the grey, darkening sky.

Glancing down, you see Adam falling under a dozen of the same snarling, skinless dogs that chased you this morning, with the two demons falling in on him after them. The golden sword flashes, killing dogs, but you can see strands of guts being ripped from him and blood spraying everywhere.

Then you are past, out of sight of the opening in the broken skylight. Up ahead, you see a small girl tied to a fixture in the roof.

Nikki.

Alexis sets you down, but grabs your shoulder before you can run to your sister. She looks at you, her eyes dark and somber, and says, "I warned you that there would be sacrifices. The time has come for you to understand what must be done."

You glance nervously at your sister. She seems to be sleeping, huddled uncomfortably as close to a low wall as she can get. You say, "What do you mean?"

“Katie, you are the Keeper reborn. You are the one who has the keys to the Gates of Heaven and Hell. You have a power unique to you in all of history, the power to change history. In your hands right now is an opportunity to end this war once and for all. I want you to unlock the Gates of Heaven and not the Gates of Hell. Bring the angels into this world, so that all mankind may be uplifted, and Earth made into Heaven, a paradise manifest.”

“If it were meant to be that way, wouldn't it have been designed that way?”

Alexis shakes her head, “The Keeper had to be given the ability to keep both sides out, but there is no reason that that tradition should continue. The angels are God's chosen children, the loyal, the true, the few who never betrayed or abandoned or disobeyed him. We want nothing more than to help humans, but there is only one thing preventing us. You.”

You nod slowly, thinking it over, then say, “What do I need to do?”

Alexis sighs, then says, “I told you there would be sacrifices. You must be prepared to face them with courage and fortitude. Are you ready?”

“As ready as I'll ever be.”

“In order to unlock the Gates, the Keeper must kill a human. It is a symbolic gesture that carries the power necessary to change reality on such a fundamental way.”

You look over at Nikki, your eyes growing wide. Alexis nods somberly and says, “Yes. That's what she is here for. I know it is hard, but you must believe in the cause. One life, and you can make Heaven manifest on Earth for everyone.

“This is bigger than curing cancer. This is more than eternal life. This is paradise on earth for everyone. Billions of people who will no longer have to suffer disease or death or poverty. Billions of people who can live in the Grace of God every day. Paradise on Earth.

“I would give my life to make this happen in a heartbeat. It is what I have struggled and striven for my entire existence. We all have.”

She bows her head, and then says, “Adam is giving his life right now to buy you the time to make this decision. Don't let his death be in vain. I know that you, yourself would give your life for this without hesitation. She is no better or worse than any other human.

“Are you ready?”

Turn to Chapter 14 if you do it.
Turn to Chapter 30 if you refuse.

Chapter 20

You look back through the door. Mr. Harris' bulbous nose, that red nose you've always hated, looks strangely sympathetic now. You just can't imagine the room filled with blood.

“Am I really the Keeper?” you ask Eric.

He shrugs, “Try it. You can banish any of us with just a thought.”

Lailah hisses, then says, "Don't listen to him, Katie! Just get it over with!"

You look at her and narrow your eyes. You say, "What if I don't want to kill him? What then?"

She looks uncomfortably back and forth between you and Eric, then spits, "Then we can't help you help your sister. If you won't help us, you're on your own!"

"Some friend you are," you say, shaking your head. You look at her quizzically, getting the distinct feeling that you can sense more about her than you did before. You feel the flows of energy connecting her...

"Leave me alone!" You say, gesturing at Lailah. With a puff of black smoke, she's gone. You giggle.

"Hey! What did you do?" Kezef blurts out, "I thought we were friends!"

"Friends don't tell friends to kill people. This doesn't kill them, does it?" you ask Eric.

"Nope, just sends them back where they came from."

"Goodbye Kezef. Sorry... Go away!" With your last words, you make a flicking sound. He looks startled, and then he too vanishes in a puff of black smoke. The faint scent of brimstone lingers in the air.

Eric smiles at you, "Not so hard, is it? Don't forget your sister. There's no one who can stop you now."

"Where is she?"

"On the roof. There's some stairs down that hall." He points.

"Come on!" you shout, running toward that hall. You take the stairs two at a time, then burst through the door at the top of them onto the school roof. You've only been up here one or two times before, usually with Adam. It brings up bittersweet memories.

"Over there," Eric says. You follow where he points to see a small figure huddled up against a low wall. She seems to be tied to some sort of fixture on the ceiling.

Turn to Chapter 37.

Chapter 21

You race down the street, heart pounding in your chest and feet pounding the pavement. It's early morning, but the sky is black with heavy clouds. The scent of impending rain is in the air. A few startled people stand in their driveways, holding their morning coffee and staring at you with wide eyes.

The snarling and snapping of hellish dogs grabs your attention. Looking behind you, you see a handful of the monsters pour from your house.

You scream, "Help me! Get away from them! Run!"

A woman on the street stares at you, flustered. She fumbles with her phone. Her eyes flick back down the street without recognition, and it dawns on you that she can't see the hellish hounds. Disbelieving, you slow and look back again.

The dogs run and leap, out-pacing one another in their eagerness to get to you. The skin seems to have been flayed off of them, leaving nothing but bone and bloody sinew. Their teeth gleam in darkness, great threads of saliva hanging off of them.

You take all that in with a glance, and then you are running again. Running for your life. Just when your lungs are burning so badly you think you can't run any farther, a van screeches to a halt just in front of you. A blond man with a crew cut in the driver seat leans over to throw open the passenger door. He barks, "Get in!"

Turn to Chapter 42 if you get in.

Turn to Chapter 11 if you take your chances on your own.

Chapter 22

Inside your pocket, your hand falls on your little sister's lucky rabbit foot. Your hand comes away with a faint white dust on it.

"Oh my god, Nikki!" You whisper. The boy looks confused. You pull out the rabbit's foot, a wave of memories of the old Clockmaker coming over you. You get a distinct pulling sensation, as if the pendant is tugging you in a certain direction.

"I've got to go. Thanks for the lunch invitation. Another time!" you blurt quickly, trying to hide the rabbit's foot. You turn and follow in the direction it pulls you, your heart beating quickly.

By this time the streets are almost completely empty, but that's to be expected with a storm moving in. The way the clouds blot out the sun, it almost looks more like evening than morning. The light that seemed so bright, waking you up just a moment ago, now seems dark and heavy. You pick up your pace, glancing nervously at the sky.

After a few minutes of fast-paced walking, you realize the pendant must be taking you to the school. You jog ahead a ways. Rounding the corner of Main Street and School Street, you nearly bump into Adam. He's just standing there, staring up. He looks tall, silhouetted against the sky. When he looks down, his face is cast in shadow, but you can see a smile there.

"Hi Katie," he says, "What's up?"

"Adam! Oh my god, you nearly gave me a heart attack," you blurt, your hand going to your throat. You ask, "What are you doing here?"

"I just thought I'd go for a walk. I wasn't expecting to bump into you." He pauses to consider, then says, "Literally. Is everything okay?"

You flounder for words for a moment, then say, "No, everything is not okay. Listen, Adam, someone has kidnapped my sister. I don't know why or who."

"Whom," he says somberly.

"What?"

"You meant to say, you don't know why or by *whom*. It's correct," he says.

You glare, "Adam, now is not the time."

"Sorry," he looks abashed, then says, "Well, obviously we need to find her."

"Yes! Thank God I found you. I could use a friend."

He cocks his head, thinking, then says, "Where was the last place you saw her?"

Rushing, you give him the hurried version of the morning's events. When you're done, he nods thoughtfully. For one terrified moment you think he's going to call you crazy. Then he says, "I've been wondering what was going on with you. This makes a lot of things make sense."

You throw your arms around him, saying, "I could kiss you! Thank you for believing me." He stumbles, startled, then hesitantly wraps his arms around you, back. He is big and warm and comforting. The hug lingers just a second longer than usual, and as you breath in, you find yourself strangely reminded of cinnamon and sunlight.

After a moment you pull away awkwardly, unable to quite meet his eyes. He pushes his glasses up his nose, clears his throat and says, "I think I know someone who might be able to help. There's a woman at the school. She should be there even though it's Sunday."

"Who is this?"

He smiles enigmatically, "You'll just have to wait and see."

Turn to Chapter 12.

Chapter 23

When you look at your old friend, you open your eyes and you look at him the way you can when you try. Suddenly, instead of the long-familiar face, with faded blond hair and dirty clothing, you see a creature of unearthly splendour and beauty. His golden locks fall over pristine, flawless skin. His eyes are deep, blue pools, just as expressive as they every have been, if not more so. Long wings of feathers and light rise from his back, each larger than his own body.

Turn back to the chapter you came from.

Chapter 24

The walk takes about fifteen minutes, mostly through quiet suburban streets. The sky seems as though it will be perpetually heavy with clouds, without growing any closer to actual rain. Adam's house is a small, suburban home with a classic white picket fence. His mom keeps the yard well taken care of, with rose bushes lining the fence.

Adam answers the door himself. He is tall and blond, with a face that looks too innocent for his years. He starts to smile when he sees you, but his expression turns to one of concern when he sees the condition you're in. He says, "Katie, are you okay?"

A flood of emotion comes over you on seeing a friendly face. Words escape you. All you can do is shake your head, tears welling in your eyes. He pulls you into a big hug. He smells like cinnamon and sunlight. You can't help it; you let yourself go.

He holds you while you cry. After just a few moments, you catch your breath and pull away. You touch his chest, where you've left a big wet spot, and say, "I've made you all snotty."

"Don't worry about it," he says, "Come on in." He holds the door open to invite you in, putting his hand on your shoulder as you enter the house. He leads you to the living room, where he sits you down while he makes a cup of tea. By the time he returns with the hot tea (in your favorite teddy bear mug), you've had a chance to collect yourself. He sits down across from you with an attitude of patient concern.

"Adam... you won't believe what's happened. My..." You can't bring yourself to talk about your parents, not yet. Instead, you say, "My sister's been kidnapped. I don't know why or by who."

"Whom," Adam says.

"I don't know."

"No, 'whom' is correct. You don't know why or by *whom*."

"You brat!" You kick at his leg, laughing despite yourself.

Adam sets his tea down and asks, "What happened?"

It all pours out in a gush. You tell him everything, and though your breath catches at points, you manage to do it without crying again. When you finish, he stares at you with wise, considerate eyes.

"Well, obviously we need to find her," he says simply.

"Yeah! You don't think I figured that much out already, Einstein?"

"I think I know someone who might be able to help. There's a woman at the school. She should be there even though it's Sunday."

"Who is this?"

He smiles enigmatically, "You'll just have to wait and see."

Turn to Chapter 12.

Chapter 25

You wrap your hands around the windowsill, your eyes fixated on the beasts struggling into this world. Cold terror grips you, but the reality of the wind on your cheek calls you back to yourself. You glance down. The alley floor is about your height down.

One of the demon-dogs breaks free and leaps at you, snapping. You shout and throw yourself out the window just before it reaches you. You try to catch your fall by gripping onto the windowsill, jerking your arm painfully. (Lose 1 Life Points)

You hit the ground running and bolt down the alley, favoring your arm.

Turn to Chapter 21.

Chapter 26

"I'm looking for the truth," you say, feeling strangely vulnerable. The old man stands up and gestures at a tiny, rolling chair with ripped padding. He smiles and says, "Please, sit down. I will make you some tea. Truth is a dry and dusty subject. It can make a soul thirsty."

You hear him clanking around in the other room for a moment. While he's gone, you examine the workroom you're in. Debris seems to fill most of the space. The shelves are covered with old parts, but there are also books and maps here and there among them, and a Hello Kitty doll on one shelf.

"What truth would you like to know?" the old man asks, returning from the kitchen with two small teacups. As you lift the steaming cup to your mouth, he says, "Careful! It can scald if you take it too quickly."

You set the cup aside to cool and ask, "What's going on? Why is this happening to me?"

"You are very special, more than you know." The old man sighs and pauses, gathering his thoughts. Eventually, he begins to speak, in a low, droning monotone that carries you away from yourself, "In the beginning, there was God. In His ultimate wisdom, He crafted self-aware beings out of His own essence. The first were called angels.

"He created them with the ability to err, and they did. In some, their errors were so extreme that they fell from Heaven. Those that fell saw only the errors of those who had remained, not their own, and the two factions began a war which has never ended.

"Seeing the pain His children experienced, the Creator tried again. This time, His greatest gift to humans was to make them mortal. They would exist apart from Him but for a time, and then return to Him. But they too, he made capable of error.

"Less powerful than angels, the humans needed some way to keep themselves safe from the wars of their elder siblings. So a Keeper was borne, someone to guard the Gates of Heaven and Hell. The Keeper was a mortal, a creature of this world, joined with an immortal, a creature of the next. Only by bridging the gap could he guard the Gates.

“The Keeper's lifespan is long, but all things must come to an end. The Keeper has passed on and the Gates of Heaven and Hell stand open. Angels and demons walk the earth in human guise. Soon bloody war shall encompass all humanity.”

“I don't understand. What does it mean?” you ask.

“It means you must follow your heart. A choice is coming, and many will offer you advice. Though each has a kernel of truth, you must remember that all God's children can err. You must follow only your own heart in the end. Only you can be responsible for your choices.

“I suggest that you pray for guidance,” the old man finishes. He collects the tea cups. When he returns, he lights several candles around the room and pushes aside a few large rugs leaning against one wall to reveal a huge, life-like statue of Jesus Christ on the cross. On a makeshift altar before the cross, he lights votives and incense. He smiles and gestures for you to approach.

Uncertainly, you kneel before the cross. Your mind is blank at first, then you find your thoughts flashing back vividly to the horrors you have seen today. The incense fills your nostrils. You feel dizzy and sick.

“What do you pray for?” The old man whispers. His voice is soothing. Somehow you now find the incense relaxing. You think of your parents. Within moments the words come to you, bursting from you. You aren't sure if you're speaking to the old man or to some higher power, but the incense and the exhaustion carry you away.

Soon you lose yourself in prayer.

Turn to Chapter 43.

Chapter 27

You hesitate, but the boy gives you an impish grin that makes you laugh. You say, “Sure, why not?”

The boy grabs your hand and excitedly pulls you back down through the alley. You're just about to ask how much farther when you come out to a small, grassy lawn enclosed by a wrought iron fence. In the center of the lot towers an old, abandoned church.

You look up at the church in awe. The stained glass windows look dark, but the old gothic architecture is silhouetted against the cloudy sky. You've always liked this church. You like to think of it as a relic of an older time, a time when the people of West Creekside still cared about things like God and religion. The city won't tear it down for its historical value, but it's been boarded up for years simply because no one wants to use it any more.

Kezef lets go of your hand and slips through the fence at a place where one of the bars is broken off. You follow, briefly snagging your jacket on the fence.

“C'mon! Lailah's inside.” Kezef practically bounces up and down with excitement. He leads you in a small wooden door in the side of the church.

Stepping into the old building feels like entering a different world. The pews are empty and cracking, but still line up in even rows as though standing to attention for a general who has

long since vanished. The vaulted ceiling lets in light both from stained glass windows, and from broken windows that open onto the grey sky. Little eddies of wind blow down the main aisle, swirling a few pieces of trash and old newspaper between the legs of the pews.

From the front of the space comes a soft, warm glow. Moving deeper into the building, you see that a few candles have been lit on the altar, and a young woman kneels on a scarlet tapestry before it. She has dark, lustrous hair that glows warmly in the candle-light.

The boy calls out, "Hey Sis, I brought home a friend!"

The young woman turns toward you, the candle-light reflecting off her eyes. She has deep-set, dark eyes and full, sensual lips, alabaster skin and rich, dark hair. She stands up, looking both dangerous and startling in this empty place.

"I am glad to see you," she smiles warmly, moving toward you. She says, "I am Lailah. My brother and I are staying here temporarily. Please, come in and make yourself comfortable."

"We've got some food here," Kezef says cheerfully, "We stole it from a pizza delivery guy just a bit ago. Dig in!"

You follow Kezef to the pizza. It still steams with warmth when you open the box, and only a couple slices are missing. Both of them move to sit next to you. Kezef fills the silence with chatter while you eat your fill, but you can't keep your eyes off Lailah, who watches you with quiet, sensual pleasure, as though drinking you in.

"Do I know you?" you ask uncertainly after a while. Her eyes glint as she says, "Not yet. But you did, once."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Tell me, Katie," Lailah says thoughtfully, "Do you believe in God?"

"I'm not sure..." you answer, "I think so. Do you?"

"Certainly."

"Me too!" Kezef pitches in.

Lailah says, "They say that God is the arbitrator of all that is good and evil. Is that right?"

"Well... I guess if he made everything, then it would be up to him, right?"

"Does a mother have the right to tell to a grown child what is right and wrong? Does a father have the right to label his son evil?"

"Not exactly, but--"

"Then why, tell me, why should we listen to the word of God? All he did was create us. Why should we care about a being who creates only to control?"

You fidget uncomfortably. The sky darkens as the clouds grow thicker, causing the light in the church to dim. The candle-light becomes more prominent, casting long, misshapen shadows across the walls.

"Let me put it this way," Lailah says, "If you could cure cancer by slowly torturing your best friend to death, would you do it?"

Turn to Chapter 36 to say, "Yes."

Turn to Chapter 8 to say, "No."

Chapter 28

You close your eyes, and when you open them again they are flushed with white. Electrical power lifts your hair. The angel before you brings her hand down, cracking a bolt of power at you like a whip, but several cables whip up from lines running along the wall and catch her blast, absorbing it into the electrical system of the building and knocking her backward. A computer system in the nearby office explodes, blowing out one of the windows into the hall and showering both of you with glass.

"Don't you dare try to hurt me," you say, standing up and crackling with power of your own.

Alexis pulls herself together, straightening her jacket and tidying her hair. You feel a rush of giddiness as you realize you've fought her down, but then she looks at you and smiles.

At that moment you feel the touch of something cold on your neck. You look over your shoulder; Adam stands behind you with a sorrowful look on his face. In his hand he holds a sword made of light.

"I'm sorry..." he says softly, his face an impassive stone wall.

"You bastard," you glare at him.

Alexis walks toward you, brushing the dust off her hands, "Well, well, well, coming into a bit of your power, are you? I'm afraid you won't have the chance to taste much more of that. Not in this lifetime.

"Kill her."

Adam takes a deep breath, the sword pressed unwavering against your neck. Then a voice rings out, "Not so fast!"

Turn to Chapter 34.

Chapter 29

You take a deep breath, fighting the sensation of a cloud coming over your mind. Finally, you shake your head and say, "It's not right to kill one person, even if it would help everyone else."

Alexis draws in her breath with a sharp hiss, and you feel like you can even hear Adam flinch behind you. She turns away and says, "You don't remember, but you made this choice once before, long ago. You made the wrong choice then. I would like to give you another chance."

She turns back to you and asks, "Do you remember anything?"

"I'm not sure what you're talking about..."

"You were an angel once. One of God's chosen. You were a soldier in the Army of Heaven, proud, beautiful, glorious. I looked up to you..."

"As did I," Adam says, walking up behind you. He looks down at you with soft eyes and touches your shoulder. (If you have The Sight and would like to use it on Adam, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 23 now, then return here.)

"You...?"

Adam looks away, a hint of shame in his eyes.

You ask, "How long have you known?"

"I came to this world when the old Keeper died. I have been watching you. It was my job." He reaches to touch your shoulder again, but you pull away.

"Adam Davenaugh loves you, Katie Munroe, as much as any angel can love another. Were you to join our ranks again, you would see that."

"He lied to me..."

"A small sacrifice to make."

You burst out, "For what? What is it you're all for?"

Alexis looks up to the ceiling, where a skylight lets in the grey light of the cloudy day. She says, "For the ultimate prize. Victory over Evil. Heaven on Earth. For the ability to vanquish Hell and its denizens once and for all, to drive them out of Earth, and to bring the legions of Heaven in to shepherd humanity and make a paradise on Earth for all time."

Her words hang in the air, resonant and powerful. More softly, she says, "Is that not worth it? Is that not worth any cost?"

Adam touches your shoulder. You look at him to see him looking at you with his heart in his eyes. He says softly, "In the early days, you were one of the greatest among us. You fell then. Come back to us now. It's not too late."

You ask, "Why did I fall?"

"Answer me this," Alexis says, "Would you sacrifice yourself, if you truly believed in a cause greater than yourself?"

You nod, "If I really believed in it."

"Then you must agree that it would be right to sacrifice another for the same cause. Even if you loved them very much, would it not be selfish to refuse?"

Turn to Chapter 31 to say, "It's different to sacrifice yourself than to sacrifice another."

Turn to Chapter 6 to say, "If it's worth a life, then it's worth a life. I am not different from anyone else."

Chapter 30

You look over at your sister. You can't tell if she's asleep, or if she just hasn't noticed you yet. She looks so small and frail. Vulnerable.

You look back at Alexis, who holds out a knife. It is not golden or glowing, a simple shaft of metal, earthly, mundane.

You shake your head, feeling a certainty come over you. You say, "I'm sorry, I can't do it. She's my sister."

Alexis' face darkens. She says, "Will you throw away everything? Look at how far we've come! To the brink, at a cost of thousands of lives! And now you will back out because you are squeamish? Because you refuse to make the sacrifices that are necessary?"

"Jesus died on the cross. He was an innocent. From the blood of innocence comes the salvation of mankind. It has been done before!"

You shake your head, "Jesus chose it for himself."

"No, he didn't! God assigned that task to him!"

"Yet he accepted it of his own free will. My sister can't do that, and shouldn't. This isn't right, what you're asking. I'm sorry, but I won't do it."

Alexis' face twists, and she lets out a scream of incoherent rage. She raises her hand to strike at you.

"That's enough!" A voice strikes out, catching Alexis mid-motion. She turns to the newcomer, murder in her eyes.

You see a man of middle-height, with close-cropped blond hair in a military-style haircut. The man from the van, from earlier this morning.

"You don't need to listen to this, Katie. You are the new Keeper. You've come into your power, you just don't know how to use it yet."

"Who are you? Where did you come from?" you ask.

He shrugs, "You can call me Eric. I've been watching, just in case I could help." (If you have The Sight and wish to use it on Eric, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 40, then return here to continue.)

"This is none of your business," Alexis snarls, "Leave us!"

“She didn't choose you, Alexis. You know the rules as well as I do. You have to go now.”

The angel raises wings of light, calling a brilliant sword to her hand. She thunders, “This isn't over!”

Eric gestures at her with his head and says to you, “You can help her along, you know.”

Alexis grows in stature to over nine feet tall and stalks toward you, strands of light flickering around her angrily. She raises her sword, preparing to strike.

Something clicks in your mind. You lift your hand and say, “Go away!”

In a flash of light, the angel implodes, leaving nothing but a trickle of golden dust where she was.

“Is she...?”

“She's fine,” Eric shrugs, “you've just sent her back to Heaven.”

“So she was really from Heaven?”

“Oh yes. Well, what's left of it. It hasn't been the same ever since the old man left. By the way, the traditional phrase is 'begone!' Saying 'go away' has a bit of a childish ring to it.”

You flush and open your mouth, but before you can respond the two demons pop up from the broken skylight. They are both splattered with blood and chunks of viscera. Lailah opens her mouth hungrily, showing rows of teeth. Kezef's body morphs as he walks, different parts growing and shrinking with his movements. A long, serpentine tongue lashes out from his mouth, licking up the blood that splatters his face. They look around, finally fixing their gaze on you.

“Begone!” you cry, pointing first at one, then the other, “Begone!”

In a flash, both of them vanish, leaving nothing but a puff of black smoke and the scent of brimstone.

“Easy, isn't it?” Eric asks, “Don't forget your sister, though.”

Turn to Chapter 37.

Chapter 31

“Foolishness,” Alexis spits. She crosses the distance between you in a flash and lifts you by your jacket collar. Her lips inches from your own, she says, “In the early days, you and your mate were chosen for a mission of vital importance, from which you would not return. When you discovered that it was known the mission would be final, you rebelled.

“You are as selfish now as you were then.” She throws you down, and you slide painfully across the floor several feet. (If you have The Sight and would like to use it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 16 now, then return here afterward.)

Alexis comes toward you, power crackling over her hands. You think you can see light forming into giant wings behind her back. She says, "If your mind is still so clouded, I will do you the favor of ending this incarnation before you can dig yourself any deeper. Perhaps in your next life you will be more wise."

"Adam!" you cry, looking around. You see Adam hunched by the wall, not looking at you. He doesn't move.

You shout, "Damn you!"

Alexis raises one hand, crackling with light and power.

If you have Telemetry and would like to use it, turn to Chapter 28

If you try to run, turn to Chapter 9.

Chapter 32

"Hmm..." you say theatrically, "Kill the math teacher who I've always hated to save my sister, or let my sister die to save the math teacher I hate. Let me think... Oh yeah!" With fake wide eyes, you fling open the door and saunter into the room.

Mr. Harris looks up at you with surprise. Recognition takes a few moments, then he says, "Ms. Munroe? What are you doing here at this time of day? It's not even a school day."

"Oh, Mr. Harris. I just wanted to tell you how you're my favorite teacher, and..." you heft a paperweight, feeling its weight in your hand, then decide it's not enough.

"Well, thank you... but couldn't this have waited till normal office hours?" He squints at you suspiciously.

You feel a chair, rattling it to get a sense of its heft, saying, "Oh no, Mr. Harris. This has to be done strictly after-hours. You see... I've got some very important things to say..."

"Are you on drugs?" He asks, his bloated face turning dark with irritation.

"You know how you always mark down my tests the stupidest things, and how you always mark up Sally, even though she's not even as smart as I am, just because she's pretty?"

He looks uncomfortable, "I don't know what you're talking about. Listen, Ms. Munroe, you should probably go home. Let's discuss this another time."

You pick up a chair and in one swift movement slam it into his face. He collapses without a sound.

"No," you say, tossing the chair aside, "I'd rather discuss this right now."

You use the letter opener. It's messy and brutal, but it doesn't take you long. Lailah shouts, "You go, girl! Yeah!"

Kezef cheers. You don't see Eric around anywhere.

Suddenly a great rushing sound fills your ears. You can hear the last beats of Mr. Harris' heart filling your ears, pounding through your own veins and heart and mind, like the last ticks of a great clock, slowly sounding out the end of the world.

The floor falls away from you, opening into a dark, empty pit. Only you and Mr. Harris' body stand on nothingness, Lailah and Kezef a few steps away, similarly floating on the blackness. All the walls and floor of the school slowly crumble into the pit all around you. It yawns wider and wider, soon swallowing the entire school and engulfing parts of the town around it.

Deep below you you can feel a tremendous heat gathering. A sinking feeling enters your stomach as you realize what you've done.

"You lied to me!" You shout over the rushing sound of the world collapsing. Lailah shrugs, smiling apologetically. She mouths, "Sorry!" then turns into a gigantic bat-like creature and flies, laughing, into the abyss, Kezef riding on her back cackling gleefully.

"You're the best, Katie!" he shouts up as they disappear.

The last beat of Mr. Harris' heart sounds, echoing silently in the void. No sooner does the last echo fade than the flood of demons from the pits of hell begins. They rush around you like a flurry of bats, in all shapes and sizes of horrific. Skinless things and monstrous things and tiny things and things of shadow and things of fire. You lose track of them all.

A moment later, the Lailah-bat reappears, carrying two figures on her back, Kezef and the small, huddled form of your sister, Nikki. She hands you Nikki, who stirs, trembling with fear. The child throws her arms around you as soon as she recognizes you, shaking like a leaf.

"Thank you!" You call to the them.

"You're one of us now. We watch out for our own!"

All around you, the stream of demons thickens and rushes past, the beating of their wings filling the world. They spread out across the earth, bringing darkness and flame wherever they go, each waving and grinning at you as they pass.

The End.

Chapter 33

As you touch Nikki's rabbit foot pendant, an impression of your little sister floods your mind. You can see all the times when she sat alone, stroking the fur on the foot while she whispered to herself. You hear her prayers.

She prayed for you. She prayed for you to be happy. She prayed for you to like her. You see her holding the rabbit's foot as she came into your room. You see her trying on your clothes, wanting to be like you, grown up and glamorous and beautiful like you. Tears burn at your eyelids.

Then the scene flashes to Nikki screaming as someone grabs her. You can make out two tall beings. They have wings that seem to fill the room. They have strong hands, they are pulling her, hurting her. She grabs at the sheets, dropping the pendant to hold on with both hands.

And then you see no more.

Lose 1 Spirit Point for using Psychometry, then turn back to Chapter 41 and continue reading where you left off.

Chapter 34

A young woman walks purposefully into the hall, the main doors of the school swinging behind her. A gust of cold wind that tastes of rain follows her into the room. She has long, dark, lustrous hair and round cheeks, but the softness of her face is belied by a hard determination in her eyes. A young boy follows along behind her, hopping along eagerly.

"I am Lailah, Angel of Conception, and I will not allow you to harm this woman." (If you have The Sight and wish to use it, mark this spot and turn to Chapter 4, then return here to continue.)

Adam pulls his sword from your neck, turning to block their path. He seems to grow taller as he moves, the lines of his body being encompassed with a golden light. You can see the sword of light shimmering from between his hands. He says, "You have no place here, demons! Go, before I scourge you from this world with holy fire."

The little boy leaps forward from behind Lailah, his body extending grotesquely as he does so. His shoulder and arm swell to massive proportions and slam Adam, knocking your friend backward solidly. The boy grins and says, "I am Kezef, Angel of Destruction, and I won't let you mess with my sister."

The boy pounces toward the place where Adam fell, parts of his body bulging to gorilla-like proportions. Adam springs to his feet and meets Kezef's charge headlong. Light and flames burst from their collision.

Lailah keeps walking, never taking her eyes off of you and Alexis. She says, in a voice rich with dark, sultry tones, "Step away from the girl. I will not allow you to harm her."

Alexis' eyes flash dangerously as she says, "You would do well to know when not to interfere, follower of Lucifer."

"At least Lucifer cares for his followers. I wish I could say the same for you."

Alexis lifts her arms, gathering golden energy around her. Lailah simply folds her arms and plants her feet, smirking. You take the opportunity to back quickly away from between the two of them.

Alexis barks, "These are demons, Katie! Fallen angels, beings of wickedness and spite! They would have you open the Gates of Hell and let in a tide of evil and darkness to devour humanity!"

You reply, "You were just about to kill me! Why should I listen to you?"

"There are things more important than our own petty concerns," Alexis spits.

"Petty concerns?" Lailah asks, "Oh, like life, liberty and justice. What about family? Is that a petty concern? Katie, why don't you ask her what happened to your parents? What happened to your sister?"

In a deadly quiet voice, you ask, "Did you kill my parents?"

Alexis' eyes flick down to you and back up to Lailah. She says, "I cannot lie. But they were no longer what they seemed. They were possessed by minor demons. Hell was going to influence you through them. That could not be allowed."

"Adam...?" You ask, feeling sick to your stomach. With a great heave, he throws Kezef off of him and comes toward you. He kneels before you, his golden locks falling over porcelain skin. Tears stand in his eyes as he says, "I am so sorry, Katie. I never wanted to hurt you..."

"Listen to me," Alexis says, her eyes burning, "These two are demons. Fallen angels with wicked hearts and poisonous tongues. Now is your chance for redemption. Do not throw it away."

"Redemption?" Lailah spits, "More like slavery. Did you ever think that maybe you quit their side for a reason in the first place?"

Kezef limps back into view, rubbing a great scorch-mark on his arm. He slowly moves into position behind Adam, watching you expectantly.

Turn to Chapter 19 if you say, "I understand, Adam. You did what you had to do. I will stand with the forces of Heaven now."

Turn to Chapter 7 if you say, "How could you do this? First my parents, then me? I don't care if they are demons; they're better than you."

Turn to Chapter 10 if you say, "This is ridiculous. I've had enough of you, all of you. Take your war elsewhere, just leave me and my family out of it."

Chapter 35

"I'm looking for my sister," you say with sudden resolve, "She was taken by... something with wings. Something that killed my parents." It's strange to hear yourself say those words, like somebody else is saying it. Mostly, you feel surprised at how little you feel.

"Ah, you have a kind soul. A brave soul, who thinks of others first. But you cannot help another until you can help yourself. Tell me, what are you?"

"I'm... I'm a human?" you stumble, trying to wrap your mind around what the old man is getting at.

"Yes! Precisely! And that is exactly why you are so important in all this. If you were anything except human, you could not be what you are. And yet, you are not entirely human."

Seeing that you are confused, the old man stands up and holds his hand out to gesture you toward a seat, saying, "Where are my manners? Please, sit down. I will make you some tea."

You take a seat, feeling more confused than when you arrived. Soon, he returns with a small, steaming cup of tea. He sits on his workbench and says, "It is all well and good to find your sister, and find her you will, have no fear about that, but the question you must ask yourself is what you intend to do once you arrive at your destination.

"You must do the right thing, of course," he continues, "but what is that? Or must you do right at all? Ultimately, the responsibility falls on you. You must follow your own heart. The world is full of those who would give advice, but all God's children were made with the capacity for error. In the end, you must answer the question yourself."

"What does this have to do with anything?" You cut him off, saying, "I'm trying to find my sister. That's all."

The old man sighs and shakes his head. He shrugs and says, "You can lead a horse to water... Do you have anything of hers? A trinket, something she values?"

If you have the rabbit's foot pendant, turn to Chapter 44.
If you have nothing of Nikki's, turn to Chapter 3.

Chapter 36

Lailah's eyes flash darkly. Even Kezef looks disappointed. Lailah says, "Your best friend. Someone who trusted you. Someone who loved you. A person like you does not deserve a friend like that."

"Sorry, I didn't know this was a test," you say sarcastically.

Lailah says sharply, "Get out of here. You are no longer the woman you once were."

You stumble over your chair in your haste to back away. Kezef fidgets, avoiding looking at you, and Lailah's eyes burn as they watch you go. You go back out the side door into the dark, cloudy day.

As soon as you get out under the open sky, you take a few deep breaths of fresh air, trying to shake the gloom of the old church off of you. You slip back out the fence and hurry around it out into the open street.

A steady trickle of cars go slowly by, and a few pedestrians give you sidelong looks. Most of them wear heavy coats with collars upturned, nothing like your light jacket over pj's. You sigh, trying to figure out what to do next.

All the talk of best friends has reminded you of yours. You turn your footsteps toward Adam's house, some recessed part of your mind still wondering if you would really have the guts to torture him to death if it would cure cancer. The thought gives you shivers. You try to push it out of your mind, and just focus on walking.

Turn to Chapter 24.

Chapter 37

You rush over to your sister's side. She sits up blearily as you approach, then asks, "Katie?"

"Nikki, oh God, Nikki, I'm so sorry it took me so long to get here! Don't worry, baby, everything's going to be all right." You rapidly untie her, then lift her up in your arms, straining only a little under her weight.

"Katie! I was so scared!" Nikki wraps her arms around you and hangs on tightly. She asks, "What happened? Where are the people with wings?"

"They're gone now, baby, they're gone."

At last the heaviness of the clouds finally breaks into rain. Light, gentle drops land on your face and eyes, coating the back of Nikki's head with a damp dew. You look up into the sky, and you can feel Nikki's heartbeat against your chest like a great clock, ticking strongly. There is a magic in the clouds that you've felt all day, the promise of rain, and something more than rain. As you look up at them now, a shudder goes through you, a shudder that is echoed in the sky, and the magic vanishes. The promise seals away, turning into rain and nothing more.

You say, "Come on, baby, let's get you out of the weather." Nikki nods into your shoulder, and you carry her back downstairs. Eric holds the door for you. By the time you get inside, you're damp and sticky, and so is your sister.

Coming up the hall you see Mr. Harris, your least favorite math teacher. His bulbous, red nose quivers with concern as he comes closer. He says, "Ms. Munroe? What happened? Why are you here?"

Eric says, "I found these two out in the rain, sir. They told me that something awful happened at their home, and that they couldn't go back. Could you call social services?"

"Yes, yes of course," Mr. Harris nods, his jowls shaking, then goes to unlock the office to get to a phone.

"They'll have a car here soon to pick you up," Eric says.

"Thank you."

"Don't mention it. I'm sorry about your parents. I'm sure the police will find some explanation for it. I understand there's some legal procedures by which you could adopt Nikki so that you can be her legal guardian and the two of you can stay together."

You nod. He hands you an envelope and says, "Here, take this. It's not much, but it'll get you by for a little while. You've got a tough job ahead of you. You're going to have to get by in the real world, but you're the Keeper also, and there will be times when you're called upon to fill that role. You'll notice you're a bit different than other people, as well. You won't age as quickly, for one thing. Eventually, that'll become a problem, but it's nothing you need to worry about for now."

"Why are you being so kind?" you ask, shaking your head.

He smiles, "Once, being an angel meant being kind. Are you going to be alright?"

"Yeah, I think so."

He nods, then pats you on the shoulder a bit awkwardly and leaves. By the time Mr. Harris gets back out of the office, Eric is gone.

"Who was that man?" Your teacher asks.

"I've never met him before in my life."

Mr. Harris shrugs, "Well, come on. Let's get you a towel. Social services will be here in a few minutes, they said they were sending someone right away, with the police too."

"Thanks," You smile at him weakly and follow him, carrying Nikki and patting her on the back. He hands you a towel, and you begin to dry off yourself and Nikki.

The End.

Chapter 38

You watch the van go. You flip it off out of sheer frustration and confusion. But you pocket the wallet anyway. After glancing at the weird card one more time, you decide you're probably better off on your own. You toss it into the trash can as you set off walking in the direction of Adam's house. At least there's one person you can count on.

Turn to Chapter 24.

Chapter 39

Overwhelmed, you back away from the empty room. The sound of the scratching seems to fill the room all around you, getting louder and louder.

Please let this be a dream. You pinch yourself.

It hurts.

Suddenly the scratching turns into a ripping and a hole opens in the floor before you. A claw reaches through. Beyond it, you think you see a starry night sky. You turn and run. Through the kitchen, out the front door, down the stairs.

You run.

Turn to Chapter 21.

Chapter 40

You look more closely at the unassuming man. His close-cropped blond hair lies close to his head and balding slightly. His body is strong, but age inclines his skin toward sagging in places. He looks worn thin, but there is a core of strength inside him still.

Looking harder, you open your other eyes, and all the world seems to fade except for him. Over him like a ghostly halo you see the faded, grey shroud of an angelic form. None of it glows anymore, and none of it seems very real, except for the two jagged stumps that emerge from his back. What must have been two beautiful, great wings are now reduced to bloody stumps that emerge about two feet out of his back, still bleeding, still writhing weakly, white with exposed bone and black with infection and rot.

He sees you looking and meets your gaze unflinching. Eventually, it's you who looks away.

Turn back to the Chapter you came from to continue reading.

Chapter 41

You rush to Nikki's bed, but there is no sign of her. The sheets are rumpled and partially pulled off. You think you can see where a hand gripped the sheets, yanking one corner off the mattress.

Something partially buried under a pillow catches your eye. You toss the pillow aside to reveal a lucky rabbit's foot pendant that belonged to Nikki. It was given to her by your father. You gingerly lift it, knowing that she never would have willingly left without this, especially if she was scared. (Write down that you have a lucky rabbit's foot pendant, if you wish to keep it. If you have Psychometry, you may mark this spot and turn to Chapter 33 now, then come back here.)

As a lump rises in your throat, the scratching sound you heard earlier suddenly turns into a ripping sound. You turn around, startled, to see a dog-like creature clawing its way out of one wall. Another rips an opening in the floor and starts clambering up through it, snapping viciously. Through the opening in the floor, you catch a glimpse of what appears to be a starry, night sky.

Turn to Chapter 17 if you have Psychokinesis and want to use it.

Turn to Chapter 25 if you escape out the window.

Chapter 42

You only hesitate a moment, then leap into the van and slam the door behind you. You glance out the window at the skinless dog-things as the man steps on the gas and the van rips away from the curb. The barking fades as you tear down city streets.

The man driving looks to be in his early forties. He's got blonde hair, but dirty and greying. His eyes look like they've seen too much. He's wearing a long coat, and he looks like the kind of guy who you wonder if he's carrying a gun under that coat. Ex-military or something.

"Who are you?" You ask. A distant part of your brain notices the hint of panic in your own voice.

"Sorry about all this, kid. I know it's gotta be rough on you," He says, slowing the van as you go around a corner.

Catching your breath, you ask, "What the hell is going on?"

He doesn't answer, glancing in the rear-view mirror as he pulls the van through a narrow alleyway. It jostles over cobblestones, knocking a trashcan aside. Some chinese guy in a stained apron comes out into the street, yelling at you. In a moment, you're through the alley and joining a main street on the other side.

He glances in the mirror again, and says, "We should be safe, for now."

A dizzying sense of rage comes over you. You open your door, and lean out, causing a nearby car to honk and swerve away. The pavement slides by underneath you in a dizzying blur. You shout, "Tell me what's going on, or I'll throw myself in the street!"

He looks at you and gives you an enigmatic smile. You can't tell if the look is mocking or approving, but somehow it causes you to sit up and close the door.

"You're awakening," he says.

"What, like magic?" you ask.

"Not exactly... Look, I can't tell you much. But there's someone who can."

"What do you mean?"

"It's not my place. There are things you have to discover on your own."

"Then why did you rescue me from those *things*?"

He shrugs, "It wouldn't do for one side or the other to get too big an advantage right away. The choice has to be yours in the end. Freely made."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

He takes a deep breath and lets it out slowly. He says, "Alright, there are some things I can tell you. You aren't what you seem."

A sinking feeling comes into your gut, as you remember all the strange things that have been happening in your life lately. You ask, "What do you mean?"

"You're not entirely human. You have a human soul, but something else as well. The soul of an angel."

"An angel...?"

He looks at you closely, then says, "A fallen angel, to be specific. Long ago, there was a war between heaven and hell. Many from both sides converted; many more were killed. At that time, the gates to Earth were closed, and a Keeper was appointed to guard the gates, keeping humans safe from both sides of the angelic wars. But not long ago, the Keeper died. It happens; the Keeper has to have a mortal soul. A new one will emerge. But in the meantime, the gates to heaven and hell slowly crack open, and a few angels and demons can slip through.

"You're one of them—more or less."

You clutch the oh-shit bar above your seat so tightly your grip turns white, even though the van is driving at a sedate pace now. Where do you begin to respond to this?

“So those were...?”

“The dogs? Demons, yes. Minor ones. There will be more. As you were a fallen angel, both sides want you back. You have friends on both sides of the battle lines, and now that you have a new incarnation, you have a chance to make your choices over again. The angels want you back, and the demons want to keep you.”

You bite your lip, your heart pounding with a different kind of fear. You blurt, “This is ridiculous. You don't actually expect me to believe all this, do you?”

He shrugs, “You asked.”

“Let me out. Let me out now! I don't want anything more to do with you and your crazy friends!”

He pulls the van over to the side of the road, parking in the bus lane.

You pause, your hand on the door, and say, “That's it, you're just going to let me go?”

“I'm not holding you prisoner.”

“What about my sister?”

He shakes his head and says, “I'm sorry... they have her.”

“Who has her?”

“I told you I can't take sides in this—Hurry, a bus is coming. Take this.” He holds out a card to you. Dazed, you take the card and slowly climb out of the van.

“Do you have change for the bus?” he shouts out to you. You shake your head. He tosses you his wallet, then pulls out of the bus lane just as the bus starts honking. The passenger side van door swings wide with his first turn, but as he veers back into line with traffic it swings shut on its own.

You fumble with the wallet, almost dropping it. Inside is over two hundred dollars in cash, but no ID or credit cards. The bus pulls up and the doors open. The other passengers start filing on, giving you strange looks as they pass. You look down at your jacket over fuzzy pajamas. You'd give you weird looks too.

You take a deep breath and try to stop your head from spinning. In your hand is the card the man gave you. It says in bold, stylish letters, 'Clockmaker,' and has an address.

You may add 'wallet with cash' to your list of possessions on Katie's character sheet. If you have the skill Healing, you may spend 1 Spirit Point to regain any lost Life Points at this time.

Turn to Chapter 15 if you go to see the Clockmaker.

Turn to Chapter 38 if you toss the card and go to your best friend's house.

Chapter 43

You wake up, groggy and disoriented. Hard light shines against your eyes, but as you crack them, you realize it's only daylight diffused through a heavy blanket of clouds. Sitting up, you find hard, gravelly cement under your fingers. A rotten, sickly sweet smell lingers in your nose. Looking over, you find the smell emanating from an open pile of trash that buzzes with flies.

You sit up, shaking the detritus of weird dreams from your mind. There is nothing familiar around you. It appears you're in an alleyway between two large buildings. You have no idea how you got here. Though you feel sluggish and slightly nauseous, you're not injured. (If you have Healing, and have lost any Life Points, you may spend 1 Spirit Point to regain them at this point.)

"Heya there," a cheerful little voice says near you. You jump. A young boy crouches behind you, watching you. He's probably not much older than your sister. He wears a backwards baseball cap and a dirty coat that's several sizes too large for him. He asks, "Whatcha doin'?"

"I don't know..." you answer, standing up and dusting yourself off as well as you can. You find that you're dressed in your pajamas, with only your little jacket over them. You pull the jacket close, trying for as much decency as you can manage. You ask, "Who are you?"

"Names Kezef. It means Destruction!" He grins. You can't help but smile. Rubbing your eyes, you joke gently, "Ready to destroy the world, eh?"

"Nah," he shrugs, "I wouldn't destroy the world. There are some people on it that I like. Hey, do you wanna come have lunch with me and my sister?"

"Do you live out here?" you ask, looking around the dingy alleyway. You shudder. You're going to need three showers to wash this place off of you.

"Just around the corner. Come on! It'll be fun!"

You reach your hand in one pocket, thinking...

If you have the Enchanted Rabbit's Foot Pendant, turn to Chapter 22.

If you don't, turn to Chapter 27.

Chapter 44

"Yes," you reply, pulling out her lucky charm. The rabbit's foot feels soft under your fingers. You can see the smooth places where she polished the hairs by the repetition of stroking it. You can feel the way her fingers must have held it.

The old man takes the pendant and mutters over it. He putters about the room, shoving some items aside on the shelves and pulling out others. He lights several candles around the room, then moves a few big rugs leaning against one wall to reveal a massive, lifelike statue of Jesus Christ on the cross. He places the pendant on a makeshift altar before the Holy Cross and begins to pray.

The low, mumbling sound of the old man's prayers seeps into you. The smoke from the candles fills the room, changing how you see things. Everything appears more bright and sharp. You can see the smokiness, and yet even that itself seems bright and sharp.

Something is pressed into your hand. Looking down, you see it's the pendant, coated in a fine, white dust.

"What do you pray for?" the old man asks, his voice soft.

Your mind swims. You close your eyes, thinking of your parents. You feel a sensation of being lifted above yourself, or falling into the void that is the world. Clutching the pendant, you lose yourself in prayer.

You may change the Rabbit's Foot Pendant on your character sheet to Enchanted Rabbit's Foot Pendant.

Turn to Chapter 43
