

# Angelish redone

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Submitted: January 19, 2007

Updated: September 3, 2007

*Angelish with more detail! ^^ I reposted chapter one with even more detail and chapter two is up as well!*  
:)

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<b>Chapter 1 - one</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Chapter 2 - Chapter two</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Chapter 3 - chapter 3</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Chapter 4 - Chapter 4</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter 5 - chapter 5</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Chapter 6 - chapter 6</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Chapter 7 - chapter 7</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter 8 - chapter 8</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Chapter 9 - chapter 9</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Chapter 10 - another chapter</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Chapter 11 - chapter 11</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>Chapter 12 - Chapter 12</b>	<b>33</b>

## 1 - one

Angel...ish

I knew I was dying. Again.

I could feel my life essence draining away through the wound in my chest. The pain was awful. Greater pain than I had ever felt before. I closed my eyes against this world and thought about all of the people I had met and would never see again. My friends. I knew they might join me eventually. As I was thinking about this the pain grew greater as if somebody was trying to pull my heart out of my rib cage with a knife. Then it all ended and I died.

I woke up sweating. I hated that dream! I sat up slowly feeling more than slightly nauseated and wiped cold perspiration from my forehead. I had been having that same dream ever since I died. Which was like what three days ago? I swung myself out of bed, wincing as my bare feet touched the ice cold marble floor and stood up. I walked over to my white dresser and opened a drawer. I pulled out the traditional short white dress that according to the note that was left for me every girl wore here. Looking at it in disgust, I pulled it on over my slip. It wasn't that I didn't enjoy wearing dresses it was just that why did it have to be white? Every inanimate object in this whole darn world was white! EVERYTHING!!! They even used a special food coloring to turn the food white. Ok so not everything was white. The sky was still blue and the grass was still green and stuff like that that they couldn't control. I glanced over to the white silk curtain that led to the outside world. I really didn't want to go out there and face everybody again. I decided to stall and cook something. They had a banquet every morning but I preferred cooking for myself. I got all of the ingredients I would need for an ommlete and turned the stove on. After I had cooked my food I slid it onto a plate, grabbed a fork and sat at the table that stood in the middle of this apartment. I ate my food as slowly as I possibly could. As I chewed I thought about how the council had completely embarrassed me yesterday. I have never picked up a sword in my life! How did they expect me to lead a whole army?! I mean I was still trying to wrap my head around the whole me being dead thing. It wasn't like the council broke it to me gently or anything! When my newly dead soul had appered in front of the council I thought I had ended up in Hell for a momment. They were that scary. The room was painted white but the light coming from the lamps fastened onto the walls was dulled slightly...It made it look like I was staring at everything through a thick layering of murky water. There were 7 of them, all sitting in identical chairs on raised platforms. Some were dressed in black some in white. Only one being was dressed in a deep blue robe. That person was in the center of all of the figures. And they were all staring at me. Well I thought they were staring at me. I couldn't really tell because their eyes were hidden under hoods but the hoods were all pointed in my direction.

"Your name," the one in the middle with the blue robe spoke in a monotone male voice.

"Uhh...Allison?"

"Full name," Deep Blue Robe Guy corrected.

"Oh um right. Allison Brown." I cringed. I had always hated the way my last name sounded. I didn't like how plain it was.

"Very well," Blue Guy said sounding satisfied. He stared at me for a few more uncomfortable seconds.

"You are dead. And you can follow Cecilia."

I stared at him for a second, disbelieving.

"D-dead?" I stuttered, "I'm not dead am I?"

I felt a hand on my shoulder and whirled around. A girl who looked around 16 or 17 stood behind me. A white dress fell just above her knees. She swept a hand over her curly, blonde hair that was pulled back into a perfect ponytail at the nape of her neck. She gave me a sympathetic look and took my wrist in her hand. She started to lead me to a plain white door that was behind me. I hadn't noticed it before.

Cecilia opened the door and led me through it and into...a field. I swear. I bright, sunny, flower covered, random, freaking field. Complete with long grasses, orange, red and purple silky wild-flowers, and a large twisted apple tree that was in bloom.

"Wha-?" I gasped. Cecilia looked back at me stopping.

"Don't you recognize this place?"

"No," I said right away, "and who are you anyway?"

"My name is Cecilia. My job is to show people who recently have died-"

"I am not dead," I interrupted, looking around frantically not wanting to believe her.

"-Around," she finished. She had the bored tone to her voice that suggested that she had made this speech several times.

"Now...Are you sure you do not recognize this place?" she asked again calmly.

I looked around taking in each little green-stemmed flower, each blade of tall brown grass. A slight breeze blew, picking up my hair and swirling it around. Apple blossom petals rode the wind in a short little dance before falling to the ground. The sky was a stunning light blue with a few wispy clouds moving lazily across the blue expanse.

"Ummm actually," I muttered. I had realized where I had seen this place before. I stared more closely at the apple tree in confusion. If I was dead then why was...

"Now do you understand why we came here?" Cecilia interrupted my thoughts, pushing up her white, square rimmed glasses on her nose.

"Uhhhhh...no."

Cecilia sighed impatiently.

"We came here so you could see your death."

"My...O-oh. Ok. Yeah...Let's go..."

"Good," she said and started walking away through the long grass.

"Wait!" I said turning towards the big twisted apple tree again.

"So you are telling me that I am dead and we are back in California on the day that I died and we are here so I can see myself dying."

"Yes," she answered simply.

"No thanks." I said turning away from the my apple tree.

She turned around again and started walking. I had no choice but to follow her. We walked through the field that I had come to so often in my childhood to read, draw, or even sing sometimes. Nobody else knew about this field. I only came here by myself and never brought anybody with me, it was strange to weave through the familiar paths in the grass with another person. Especially with one who didn't seem to like me very much and who had informed me that I was dead. The field ended and we walked through the huge thorn bush that separated my meadow from the rest of the world. A path of broken bricks lead us to my hometown. I stared around at the people going about their daily business.

"Mrs. Bryd!" I yelled recognizing my next door neighbor. I ran away from Cecilia and jumped in front of the plump woman clad in a long pink dress with tow bags of groceries in her arms. "Please help me! There's a girl over there who says I'm dead and its really freaking me out! Can you-Oh!" Mrs. Bryd had completely ignored me and had walked through me. The sensation was terrible. I could feel my bones

scraping against hers for the split second in which our bodies were together. Mrs. Bryd kept walking on as if nothing had happened. I kept very still. I turned my head to Cecilia.

"That was weird. Can't they see us?" I asked. Cecilia threw me a, "No freaking Duh," look and kept walking.

Alrighty then...

We walked until we got to my school. It wasn't that far away from my field. Only about four blocks or so. I was a freshman as far as I could remember. I knew it was something like the first or second week of school because there was a line of kids at the office waiting for a new copy of their schedules that they had all lost. I couldn't understand why we were here. Then I realized, slowly.

"So...It happened in school?" I asked.

"Right between third and fourth period." she said matter-of-factly. I followed her to a bench across some stairs and in front of my fourth period English classroom.

Cecilia motioned for me to sit down on the bench. I obeyed and she sat down next to me. She glanced at her watch.

"Any second now," she muttered darkly.

The bell rang.

I looked up as a whole bunch of students stormed out of different classrooms. Cecilia pointed to the top of the staircase. Standing there was the spitting image of myself. Waist length curly brown hair loose and bouncing up and down as I walked.

"Man this is weird..." I muttered. The past me carried a stack of books in her arms as she got closer and closer to the stairs. I turned my head away, almost guessing what was going to happen next. I'm such a klutz.

"You have to watch." said Cecilia, probably knowing that the only thing I wanted to do was to run away from the scene and hide. It sounded like she was enjoying this. Well good! I am SO glad that I provide amusement for her.

I turned toward the stairs, dreading the inevitable. The past me rifled through her books, looking for her schedule if I remembered my last moments right. She was focusing all of her attention on her books and not noticing how close she was getting to the stairs. She was at the top stair now. Somebody called her name from behind her and as she turned to face them she tripped over her own feet-HER OWN FEET-and fell down the stairs, somersaulting over her head. I heard a crack and winced. Her neck had broken. She fell to the bottom of the stairs and sprawled there, cracking her head on the ground. She lay there as blood leaked out around her. The boy who had called her name stood at the top of the stairs with his hand on his brown hair staring down at the girl lying crumpled at the bottom of the stairs in shock. I stared at the scene. Time seemed to stop for a few long seconds. There was dead silence. A girl standing next to my body screamed and recoiled. Time started back up again with a snap. More people yelled. Some guy called for a doctor. Everybody started moving. Everybody except that boy who had called the bleeding girl's name from the stairs. He stood stock still, still staring down at her. For a moment the corners of his mouth seemed to twitch as if he was about to smile. But after a fraction of a second the moment was over and I realized I must have imagined it. People then ran to the girl laid out half on, half off of the stairs. Who was me. Have I mentioned that I was lying there, bleeding to death? My fourth period English teacher rushed out of his classroom and took in the hallway.

"Oh my god...Move away from her! Give her room!" He cleared a space around the girl who lay motionless on the tiles. The doctors came a few minutes later carrying a stretcher even though I think everybody knew it was too late to save the girl. I could bear to watch anymore. I turned my head away from my body and looked toward where Cecilia was sitting next to me, planning to ask her if I was allowed to leave now. Nobody was there. I stood up and glanced around the crowded hallway frantically, trying to find her. She was nowhere to be seen. I looked back to the bench and noticed a piece of paper

laying on the seat. I rushed over to it and picked it up. On it were scrawled a few words in that neat meticulous handwriting that just had to be Cecilia's.

Allison,

Your first test is to  
find your way out of  
the past and back to  
First Heaven, Go.

Your time is limited.

-Cecilia

P.S. Helpful hint-Going  
back to where everything  
started should help.

"Oh no," I murmured. "Oh no, oh no, oh crap, oh no." I was panicking. I was alone in the past and my time was limited. Did that mean if I couldn't get out of here I would disappear? Fail? Die again? Be stuck here forever, forced to watch myself die again and again?

"Ummmmmm..." I went up to one of the doctors who was lifting my body onto the stretcher. Reaching out I tried to tap her shoulder. My hand went right through her arm.

I cursed. I had forgotten I couldn't touch anybody. I was on my own. I stared at my hand angrily. The doctor paused for a moment and shivered. She looked around, shrugged and continued working on getting my body onto the stretcher. I noticed that they weren't exactly rushing. They probably knew I was dead too.

"Ok so talking to people isn't an option..." I mused.

"Uhhhhh," I turned away from my body that was now being covered with a white cloth and wondered how much time I had.

"Maybe I should go back to my field," I thought out loud trying to comfort myself. "That was where Cecilia had first taken me so that must be where I am supposed to go."

I spun around and sprinted, literally through the crowd. The disgusting feeling of another person's bones scraping against mine was overwhelming. I ran out of the school nearly tripping to avoid colliding into people and back to the field of my childhood.

We had landed right next to the flowering apple tree. I headed toward that area and stood there. I stared around stupidly. This was about as far as my plan had gone.

"Maybe if I close my eyes, click my heals three times and wish myself back..." I muttered angrily. I paused for a second, considering. "No that only works in the movies." I chastised myself feeling like a complete idiot.

I flopped down onto the ground and let out a scream of frustration. After sitting there for a few seconds thinking furiously I took the note Cecilia had left so kindly for me out of my pocket and re-read it.

"Going back to where everything started should help..."

"Wasn't this where everything started?" I asked nobody in particular trying to calm down and think logically. "Unless..."

I turned back towards the school and started running. I was doing a lot of running lately and wasn't exactly in the best of shapes. I had always been really bad at gym class. The adrenaline rush kept me going though.

I got back to the staircase outside of my English classroom and looked around. People were still gathered around the spot where I died, talking to each other. The brown haired boy was now sitting on the top stair still staring at the spot where I died. Silent tears had started to run down his cheeks. He couldn't possibly think this was his fault could he? I climbed the stairs and stood beside him. I reached

out my hand to try and touch his shoulder even though I knew I wouldn't be able to. I didn't even know who this guy was. I drew my hand back, deciding against this friendly gesture. I didn't want to feel my bones and his scrape horribly together. And besides I didn't have time for this. I clenched my hands into fists and shut my eyes really tightly.

After standing there for a couple of seconds I realized that this wasn't working either. I paced back and forth behind the boy.

"I went back to my field, went to where I died..." On an impulse I took the piece of paper back out of my pocket and turned it over. There was something written on the back. Feeling like an idiot, I read the message.

Death is the  
Passageway to a new  
life. To get there, one must  
Leave the body. However  
To return, one must put the  
body to rest.

I stared at the piece of paper for a while and then crumpled it up and shoved it in my pocket. I looked around frantically for the doctors who had my body. I didn't see them anywhere but I decided to head toward the front entrance which was the closest to the staircase. Half running, half walking, trying to avoid touching any of the people milling about the hallways. I made it to the entrance. The doctors were halfway down the flower lined side walk that led to the road where an ambulance was parked. The car's lights were flashing wildly and their colors clashed horribly with the pink, orange, yellow, and green houses behind them. I ran beside the stretcher with my body under that white cloth. I reached up to pull back the sheet, but, of course, my hand couldn't grasp it. I briefly wondered why I was able to sit down and walk on the ground with out falling through the earth but I didn't have time to dwell on anything. A new sense of urgency was building up within me. I didn't know why I had to hurry but I knew I did. Time was running out.

I passed my hand over my lifeless body, while keeping pace with the doctors. Taking a chance, I launched myself as high as I could and twisted toward the stretcher, landing inside my body.

For a moment I was alive again. The pain was maddening. My violent shaking sent spasms of agony that coursed through my entire being. I couldn't breath. I couldn't move. The edges of broken bones tried to poke through skin and my body moved around spastically, my soul trying to get out. It felt like I was dying all over again. But I didn't fall through my body and the stretcher.

After a few more seconds of pure torture, I was free. I felt myself rising and the pain stopped suddenly.

"What the hell was that?!" I heard one of the doctors yelling. I couldn't force my eyes to open. I floated farther and farther away on a breeze of painless bliss.

"I don't know!"

"There was absolutely no chance she could have survived a broken neck and a cracked skull!"

"But she did! For a few seconds anyway..."

"She's not still alive is she?"

"No, she's not...I don't under-"

The worried voices of the doctors faded away into nothing and I passed out completely.

## 2 - Chapter two

### Chapter two

I woke up thinking that I had better get up and get to school before was late. My alarm clock must not have gone off yet. I needed to get up and finish the math homework that I had put off last night. But I really didn't want to get out of bed. I was so warm and comfortable...

My eyes flew open and I sat up quickly, remembering everything. My head ached and I clutched my head in my hands.

"Cecilia?" I called tentatively through my fingers.

"She is currently showing another person their death. Call me Buzz!"

"Buzz?" I said turning around looking for the person who was talking but seeing noone. I was sitting in a room that was painted white and had a white throw rug on the white painted floor and a white, wooden chair that sat a few feet away from the white bed that I was sitting on. Someone had removed my jeans and t-shirt and replaced them with a short, unpatterned, sleeveless dress like the one Cecilia had been wearing.

I jumped out of the bed quickly but immediately regretted it. I sat down again holding my head.

"Well its because when I was in the 3rd grade, and alive there were four other people with the same old boring name as mine in my class. The teacher was always getting the four of us mixed up. I hated that. I was a rather independent child." she added chuckling. "I asked my classmates to call me something else. This one kid yelled out, 'How about Buzz? Because she is so hyper all of the time!' So from then on I was known as Buzz!"

"Wow," I really didn't need to know that. "Where are you? Why can't I see you?"

"Oh right sorry." A young girl appeared on the chair beside my bed. She tossed her shockingly neon green hip-length hair out of her hazel eyes and straightened the same kind of short, white dress that I was wearing. She smiled at me slyly.

"Oh," I gasped at the sudden entrance.

"Can you walk, Allison?"

"How do you know my name?"

"Oh that's not important," she paused, "Well, it is but we will get to that later. Can you walk?"

"Well, probab-"

"Great!" she interrupted and bounced to her feet, grabbing my arm. I swayed slightly and she steadied me with her hand.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I thi-"

"Great!" she said again. "We have to go! It's the second day you've been here! The council is so excited!"

Council? What was she talking about?

"Second day?"

"Yep!" she said and grasped my wrist with both hands. Turning to face me she whispered,

"I never thought I would be in this position when you came here..." Her eyes searched my features and a strange looked crossed over her face. What was it? Pride? I couldn't be sure. Why would she be proud of me? All I was doing was standing up. This was all very weird.

"Anyway, let's go!" She cried, and pulled me across the room and to the door. She opened the door and led me out into a town.

There were buildings from various time periods and different countries. A Japanese house, complete with square, swooping roofs, an ancient Roman building stood, supported by columns. There were people too, all of different ethnicities, shapes, sizes. The women all wore the same short white dresses and the men all wore long white pants and a short-sleeved shirt. For a second I wondered if they got uncomfortable during the heat or the cold but then realized that the temperature was and had been the same all throughout my stay here. Not too hot to be uncomfortable in long pants, but not cold enough to freeze to death in the short white dresses. Strange.

Speaking of strange things, besides me being dead, they all seemed to be heading in one direction as if they had the same destination.

"Well, gotta go, bye!" Buzz shouted and ran a few feet in the direction all of the people were going in before vanishing in a swirl of green hair.

"Wait! No, Buzz come back!" I screamed after her. Why did everybody keep leaving me? I started running after her.

After running a few feet, I realized that all of the people had parted, making a path for me to run through. Some of them had even stopped and were staring at me in awe. Others whispered behind their hands to their companions. I decided to ignore them and concentrated on running as fast as I could after Buzz. I ran until I could see the place where all of the people were going. A huge white building was standing in the middle of a wide patch of land without other houses. It looked kind of like a larger parliament house.

"Wow..." I breathed. I started running again and ran right through the huge marble doors that were standing open. It was very dark inside, with a few lights attached to the walls turned on very low. When my eyes adjusted to the dim light I saw lots of people standing beside the walls. They made a semi-circle around...me. To my surprise I was standing all alone in the middle of the room. I felt very uncomfortable and tried my best to search for Buzz. Everybody was staring openly at me. My eyes wandered to the wall opposite of the huge double doors. There were those same 7 cloaked figures that I had met when I first came here. They still had those hoods over their heads and were once again staring at me.

I stood there rooted to the spot, looking at each of the cloaked creatures staring back from under their hoods.

"Welcome Allison," Deep Blue Robe Guy said, standing up. He seemed to be the leader of this group.

"Welcome," the other members of the Let's-All-Wear-A-Scary-Dark-Cloak-To-Freak-Allison-Out-When-She-Is-Already-Unstable-Because-She-Is-Still-Adjusting-To-The-Fact-That-She-Is-Dead Club echoed and stood up as well.

"We are proud to have you among us today when we are in such great peril," Deep Blue Robe Guy spoke for the group again.

I stared at him wondering if I was allowed to talk. When I couldn't take the uncomfortable silence anymore I spoke. "Peril? Surely you can't be in peril! I mean this is HEAVEN right?! Heaven can't be in peril!"

"Well, um actually..." D.B.R.G. muttered, sounding embarrassed.

"Wow, what did you DO?" I asked rather rudely.

"I-I-It wasn't my-T-that is not important right now!" Boomed D.B.R.G. losing his cool. He wasn't sounding too high and mighty right now.

"Wow it must have been something really bad..."

"It was and is," he sighed. "That is why we need your help."

"Wait. My help? Me?!" I started laughing. "I am just a lowly 15 year old! What could I possibly do to help you?" I chuckled to myself somewhat hysterically for a few more seconds. Another awkward silence fell. I straightened up and looked around. "Me?" I said again.

"Yes," D.B.R.G. stated, "We need you to lead us in war against the army of Hell."



## 3 - chapter 3

### Chapter 3

I couldn't speak. My throat was too dry and there seemed to be a large lump in the middle of my esophagus that probably wouldn't let any words pass anyway.

Ok. I was not athletic at school when I was alive and I didn't turn suddenly into one huge muscle when I died so this whole me leading an army thing? Not going to go very well.

I cleared my throat, suddenly aware of all of the people that were present. The Freaky Cloak Club and the hundreds people of all ages all standing by the walls. They, had put their faith in me. Boy, somebody around here had really bad logic skills. What was I going to say?

"Uhhhhh..." I managed, swallowing hard.

"We know you will accept the position and aid us in this war. And for that, we thank you. Now, tomorrow you will start training with the first council member."

"Uhhhh...Who might that be?" I said, stalling, trying to get my thoughts together.

A member of the Cloak Club stood up from their seat at the end of the line of chairs. This one was wearing a dark black cloak. They raised their hand in greeting and then sat down again.

Wow. That was informative.

"Ok," I breathed, finally getting some reasonable words out of my mouth. "I really appreciate the confidence you are placing in me but I have no war training!" I protested, my voice getting higher and more frantic as I went on, "I'm not even sure this is all real! This could just be a really, really elaborate, detailed dream for all I know! And even if this is real I don't even know you people! I don't know how to use a sword, or shoot a gun, or whatever, or command an army, or make decisions that could alter the course of people's lives! People die in wars! I'm not ready for that responsibility! I can barely make up my mind on what to eat for breakfast in the morning! I can't decide who is going to die! And this is even more important than just the lives of the people fighting the war! This is gonna affect the people who are still alive! And what about that, huh?! What happens when you die here? Do you disappear?! Do you just cease existing?! I'm not ready for this! I don't know what to do! I'm sorry, I can't..." I was sobbing by now. I tried to wipe the tears away and stand up straight, very much aware how stupid I was being, but I couldn't. The tears kept coming and I couldn't talk anymore. All of this was so overwhelming. My death, that poor boy who thought it was his fault that I died, this new responsibility of leading an entire army, and meeting the Creepy Council Members who were supposedly going to train me in the arts of war. I fell to my knees. I couldn't do it. I just couldn't.

"I'm sorry...I'm so sorry." I murmured.

"You must lead us. Someday you will know why, but today it is just enough to know that you have to." Blue Robe Guy was really starting to get on my last nerve with all of this philosophical stuff. He stood up and walked over to me. Taking a cup from a simple wooden table in a corner he held it out to me. I tried to get a good look at his face but he just reached up with his free hand and pulled his hood down farther. I had a feeling that he was grinning under there. Scowling at him, I stood up and took the cup. It was large and heavy and was painted white. Peering into it I saw a clear liquid. Water. I wiped away the last of my tears and stood up straight. I had cried myself dry.

"I don't want to do this." I said shakily.

"I know." said Deep Blue Robe Guy, "Drink. You need it."

I nodded and lifted the cup to my lips. "I'm sorry for being so stupid and selfish." I said. And I was. I hate being perceived as weak and idiotic even though I sometimes can be. I hated crying in front of

people. I usually can avoid it but with all of the terrible things that had happened, I wasn't able to hold it in.

"It's okay. You had a hard day," he said, echoing my thoughts, "Now drink."

I drained the cup in one gulp. Hey, I was thirsty. I had been doing a lot of running lately and apparently dead people still need nourishment.

I glanced around for a few moments. "Now wha-" I suddenly felt very tired. My eyelids were closing on their own accord. My body was screaming at me for rest.

"You...You did something to it. You drugged it!" I managed. "I'm not sorry anymore!" I sank to my knees again and sagged against D.B.R.G's legs.

D.B.R.G. laughed softly "Don't worry. You need to rest. You will be fine. We will get you to a room to sleep in and recover. Your training will start tom--"

But that's all I heard. After that I fell into a much needed, dreamless sleep.

## 4 - Chapter 4

Chapter four

I chewed my eggs thoughtfully and stared at the note sitting on the table.

Allison,

I trust you have had a restful sleep. I apologize for our lead council member. He was very blunt. I will be starting to teach you today.

All of the girls have to wear knee-length white dresses in world. You will find a few in the wardrobe by the wall. If you are hungry then you may go to the feast that is held in the Great Hall. Just go outside and ask where it is located. The towns people will be happy to assist you, I'm sure.

I will meet you outside of your apartment after you have dined.

Goodbye.

-First Council Member

Do these people not have names or something? Pushing the note away, I continued to eat. There was no way I was going out there to eat with all of the people I had broken down in front of last night. I was curious as to what kind of war training I would be getting. Would I have to have lessons with all seven of the Council Members? I hoped not. If the first one's note reflected all of their personalities, I knew I wasn't going to enjoy this. I probably wouldn't enjoy this even if they were the most exciting people in the world. This was going to end in death.

Second death.

Whatever.

I was too worried to care about logic.

I heard a knock on the door.

Oh no. Here we go.

"Come in." I heard myself saying. The curtain covering the front door parted and in came—

"Buzz?!" I jumped up in astonishment.

"Hi Allison!" She sang, skipping over to the white table and sitting on it.

"Where did you go yesterday? Why did you abandon me?!" I asked her angrily.

"I had a job to do!" She stated, jumping up and drawing invisible patterns on the table with her fingers.

"But everybody else in this world was watching me embarrass myself last night! What could you have possibly had to do?"

She smiled at me and shook her head with each word, "Allison, Allison, Allison." She stood made a swirling motion with her hands and from nothing, a dark black cloak appeared in her hands. It was so strange to see that color after so much unnatural white.

"You!" I gasped, fingering the material and realizing that it was exactly like the ones those annoying council members wore. "You're going to teach me?!"

"Yep! Well, just the first part. I'm going to teach you how to make your weapons! Then somebody else will take over!"

I stared at her. "So you wrote that note? That was so...well...ummm...never mind..." I trailed off lamely.

"Yeah I know!" she grinned, "Anyway. Are you ready to go?"

"I guess s--"

"Ok let's go!" she interrupted again. I smiled to myself and got up and put my empty dish into the sink. Buzz made her cloak disappear and strode out of the door confidently. I was in the process of following her when I thought of a few things about this place that didn't quite fit.

"Uh, Buzz?" I asked stopping right outside the door. "I may not be a religious expert but um, isn't there supposed to be some sort of god? And if we're dead, why don't we have wings and halos?"

"Oh that," she muttered "Well the council acts as sort of a god as you put it. We don't really have that much of an effect on the people down on earth though. They made up the Bible, Buddha and all of the other religious stuff you have down there. They were pretty much right about the wings and the halos though! But you don't get the wings until level 7. As for the halos, well, nobody gets those until they are council members. I have them but I choose not to show them. I have to keep a low profile around the towns-people. I can't have them knowing I am on the council. It's not allowed. I would have people coming to me night and day for help."

"Oh ok." I had no idea what she had just said. "So...where are we going?" I asked her as we walked through all of the white houses. People passed by too, staring at me. One little girl detached herself from her mother's hand and skipped over to me to hand me a little white flower.

"Thank you" I said, taking it from her. "What's this for?"

"Because you are going to save us." she said simply and then skipped off back to her mother who grinned and led her daughter away, smoothing down her brown curls. I stared after her and suddenly realized that Buzz hadn't stopped to wait for me and was now several houses ahead of me. I caught up with her and was about to pose my question again when she continued our conversation as if there had been no interruption.

"To my place!"

"How far away is it from here?" I asked fingering the girl's flower in confusion.

"Not far."

I fell silent watching Buzz's apple green hair bounce up and down and she skipped in front of me. I realized she seemed a bit young to be teaching me war arts.

"Hey Buzz, how old are you?"

She stopped and turned back towards me, walking backwards. "13 when I died. 1064 years last month in all!"

"Wow!"

"Yeah it's pretty interesting being this old." She said, not sounding like she was enjoying it very much.

"What's so bad about it?" I asked walking to her side.

"Nothing! We're here!" She said quickly.

I looked away from Buzz to see a huge four story white house. Buzz opened the white gate and lead me into her giant house.

"How many people live here?" I asked in awe looking at the many rooms.

"Just me!" She sang. "Come on! Let's get to work! You have a lot to learn and we don't have all that

much time.”

“Ok,” I said following her past several rooms. “You have a very nice house.” I complimented.

“Thanks. It was my brother’s. He left it for me when he....left.”

“Wow.” I said staring around at the large array of furniture.

Buzz had a brother?

“That’s cool.”

“Yep!” said Buzz. “Come on let’s go to the back room. We will start with a fighting staff.”

“Oh.” I said, slightly surprised. I had been thinking we would have been making a sword or a gun or something. What would I use a fighting staff for in a war?

We walked down several carpeted, twisting hallways with several closed doors. It was a large white wooden door with a white doorknob with carvings on it. The carvings were too small for me to see from where I was standing but they looked very intricate and beautiful.

“Let’s go!” She said, pulling open the door. I stepped over the thresh-hold and into a forest. Nope not kidding. A real forest. Huge redwood trees grew close together, the floor underneath them covered in ferns. Tiny wild flowers piked their heads out from under the leaves, shyly. Sunlight streamed through gaps in the branches, bathing the ground in a dappled, golden light. Several birds called to one another from the branches.

I was almost not surprised.

“Where did this come from?” I asked in awe.

“This was always here! We just built the house around it! It is a nice place to come and read or have a picnic or to get sticks and stuff to build fires and in our case, a fighting staff. So go ahead. Pick your wood.”

“Wait what am I supposed to do?” I asked, confused.

“Pick a good piece of wood to make a fighting staff out of!” Buzz said slowly as if it was the easiest thing in the world to do.

“You know I don’t have any experience with this at all right?”

“Well obviously or I wouldn’t have to teach you.”

“Ok.” I turned away from her and looked at all of the loose wood that was lying all over the ground. I would probably want a long one. Uh a long straight thick one. I rummaged through the sticks, rejecting the ones that were too, short, thin, or curved. I finally came across medium sized, relatively straight, and reasonably thick stick. It was the best one I had come across so far.

“How’s this?” I said holding out the stick to her.

She took it in her hands, and inspected every inch of it. After a few moments she took the branch in both hands and tried to break it across her knee. When it held she smiled approvingly and handed the stick back to me. “This will do.” she said walking away from me and my stick. I followed her twirling the stick experimentally in my hands. We walked across the thick carpeting of pine needles and ferns, dodging trees and listening to several birds singing their hearts out.

‘They must have been birds who died,’ I thought as I picked my way around a muddy puddle in the ground. Finally we broke through the trees and came to a grass filled clearing with several large, moss covered rocks scattered about. Buzz went over to a tree at the edge of the woods and pulled a leather-handled knife out of its rough bark.

She sat down on one of the rocks and beckoned for me to come over to her. I sat down on another rock and laid the stick across my lap. She handed me the knife handle first.

“Now you have to whittle it.” When I looked at her in confusion, she elaborated, “You have to take all of the bark off. You use the knife,” she demonstrated, taking knife and stick away from me, and slid the knife underneath a strip of bark and peeling it away from the wood.

She handed the objects back to me.

“Right. Okay got it.” I said holding the knife awkwardly in my left hand. I started stripping slivers of bark away from my stick. It was harder than it looked. The knife kept slipping. I tried switching the knife to my right hand but that was even worse. I gripped the knife tighter in my now sweaty left hand and continued. A couple of times I slipped and nicked my fingers, painfully. Buzz happily corrected me, moving the hands that were holding the stick in place behind the hand with the knife. It was hard. And I wasn’t very good at it.

It felt like I had been working for an hour.

“Ok, done.” I said tiredly holding out the now bark-less stick for inspection. “Good. For a first attempt of course.”

“Thanks.” I said bitterly, flexing my sore hands. At least I didn’t have to go through that process again.

“You will learn to use this later on in your training.” Buzz said placing the whittled stick on the ground next to her rock. I sighed in relief. I wouldn’t have to learn how to kill people for a while yet.

“ For now we will move on. Next we will make a spear!”

“Wait, a spear? You mean like wooden spear?”

“Yep! After you master the wooden stuff we will move onto metals!”

“So I have to whittle something again?”

“Yeah!”

I groaned inwardly lying back on the sun-warmed rock. No more whittling please.

## 5 - chapter 5

### Chapter 5

For the next week I adjusted, and worked on making weapons with Buzz. I made a dagger and moved onto a short sword. Next came a medium size sword, and finally a regular size sword. When I was finished with all of these I had two daggers, three swords of various sizes, and my fighting staff, spear, and bow and arrows.

"It is so hot in here," I complained, wiping off the sweat that had accumulated annoyingly on my forehead. We were in the forge that was built in yet another clearing in the forest. It was very dark except for the large fire that was burning in the grate. I pulled out the unfinished sword that I was working on out of the fire and shoved it in the water barrel to cool it.

"Well...yeah." Buzz said pointing to the roaring fire.

I ignored her and picked up the large hammer and pounded the sword into shape.

After a couple more minutes I was finished and plunged the sword into the water again.

I brandished the wet sword in Buzz's face, "Can we please go outside now?" I begged.

Buzz carefully it from my hand by the hilt and inspected it.

"It'll do."

"Yes! We can go outside now right?!"

"Yep!"

"Thank you!!!"

I ran out of the 110 degree room and into the cooler forest. In my haste I tripped over a small rock and fell to the ground.

"Allison?! Allison are you ok?! What happened?"

"I'm fine." I said sitting up and rubbing my head. "I trip like that all of the time. You should get used to it." Buzz knelt down beside me and peered into my face.

"Are you sure you are all right?"

"Yeah I-"

"Great! Now that you have completed your training with me we can go to the council tonight and you can move on to the next level!" she interrupted grabbing my arm and pulling me up.

"Wait...what?" Did I hear right?

"Yeah! We will go to the council tonight and you will be given a test on what I have taught you here! It'll be fun!"

A test? Uh oh. I never did well in tests. They freaked me out.

So what happens in the next level?" I asked.

"The Second Council Member will continue your training,"

"Wait, won't you keep teaching me?"

"Me? No!" Buzz said laughing. "You will go through at least seven levels and seven teachers until you are ready for the war."

"Oh." I said not quite understanding. "Will I see you again after tonight?" I asked hopefully. Buzz had become my best friend. She was easy to talk to and a good listener. She kept me sane this past week.

"Probably when the war starts..."

"What?! But-"

"My instructions were to teach you how to make weapons for the war and that's it," her voice was suddenly cold. "We weren't supposed to become such good friends," she added so quietly under her

breath that I almost didn't hear it. "It's going to make things a lot harder."

"What's that supposed to mean?!" I yelled, hurt.

"Nothing." She muttered. "I'll come get you tonight to take you to the council," she continued her voice like ice.

"Wait, Buzz!" But I was too late. Buzz's wings unfurled and she was gone. I picked up a feather that she had fallen out of her wing and looked at it angrily. I had lost my best friend and I didn't know why. It was somehow my fault and tonight I had see the council and that annoying guy with the blue robe and take some test. I wiped away tears that had fallen from my eyes and turned away to go back to my apartment.



## 6 - chapter 6

### Chapter 6

I waited outside the door for Buzz, looking at the darkening sky. After a few minutes she glided in, folded her wings and her arms and stared at me.

"Let's go."

"Fine."

We walked in silence for a while.

"Buzz, I-" I started, intending to apologize for whatever I had done.

"No. It's my fault." She said, not looking at me.

We walked to the council meeting without talking. I for one was afraid to talk. I had absolutely no idea what to say to her. I didn't understand why she had been so cold.

When we got up to the doors, Buzz pulled her cloak from the air, flung it on, and disappeared.

I pushed the double doors open myself and walked in.

Everything was the same as last time except that there weren't any people standing around staring at me. Just seven random people in cloaks.

"Allison," boomed my favorite member of the creepy-cloak-club, standing up.

"Hello," I said staring back at Deep Blue Robe Guy.

"Don't interrupt me!"

"Oh right. Wouldn't want your majesty to lose his train of thought," I retorted crossing my arms. I was still angry for being drugged the last time I was here.

D.B.R.G. stood there staring at me. I briefly wondered if I had gone too far and regretted being so short tempered but then remembered how annoying this guy was and suddenly stopped caring.

D.B.R.G. looked at me blankly. I wondered if anybody had ever dared to talk to him that way.

After a few more awkward seconds of silence I said, "Soooooo... What's this test going to be about?"

D.B.R.G. shook his head and cleared his throat. "You will have to demonstrate your knowledge of wood, weapons, and how to make weapons."

"What happens if I pass?"

"You go to the next level and learn something else."

"And what would that be?"

"You'll find out later."

"What happens if I fail?"

"You'll find out if that happens."

Hmmm. Comforting guy.

D.B.R.G. stood up impressively and waved his arms. I heard a small sound to my right and turned to look. Clattering to the ground were a whole bunch of...sticks.

"Oh no..." I muttered, "Not more whittling!"

"What was that?" D.B.R.G. asked.

"Oh nothing," I said walking over to the sticks. I bent down reluctantly to start inspecting them.

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After a few hours worth of picking out sticks, forging swords and daggers in the forge with the metals that D.B.R.G. had conjured for me, and whittling, I presented my newly made weapons to D.B.R.G. He stared at them for a few nerve-racking moments.

"These are acceptable." He said finally. I glanced over to where I knew Buzz was sitting. She twitched a

little. I smiled slightly at her.

“Soooooooooooo...” I said again, “What now?”

“Now...” Said D.B.R.G., “You come with me.”

“Where are we going?” I asked nervously.

“2nd Heaven.” he said jumping down from the platform with a grace I envied.

“Ummm...right.”

He walked down next to me and roughly grabbed my arm with a gloved hand. He was pretty strong and his grip was hard but I didn't want to show weakness so I stood my ground and didn't pull away.

Instead I twisted around and waved to the council, “Bye guys! See you, Buzz. I'm sorry for whatever I did to make you angry. I don't care about the problem of making friends in times of war. I think you are really cool and hope we can still be friends.” I paused, staring at her. When I didn't get a reaction I smiled bitterly and waved again. I turned back to D.B.R.G. “Ok, let's go.”

Before he could do anything, however I heard running footsteps. I whirled around expecting to be attacked as some random part of the test that they had failed to tell me about. Instead I saw Buzz running towards me, her hood slipping off her head. She ran into me and I was engulfed in a mass of green hair.

I hugged her back, extremely glad to have her as a friend again.

“I'm sorry!” She sobbed, “I was so stupid! Of course it's ok to have friends during a war. I'll fight by your side when it's time! I'll-” here she buried her head into my shoulder and all I got from her after that was: “Mrmph mumf trund whelf meshsn.”

D.B.R.G. cleared his throat uncomfortably and prodded me in the back.

I detached Buzz from my neck.

“Bye.” I said.

“See you!” She said wiping the tears from her face, smiling.

D.B.R.G. grabbed my arm again. I gave one last wave and smile to the remaining council members, wondering who would be teaching me next and what.

I heard a snapping sound and looked up at D.B.R.G. His blue, almost black wings unfurled from his back and flapped once or twice. He then grabbed my other arm and flew through a hole in the ceiling that I hadn't even noticed was there. My stomach dropped as we left the ground and I bit back the yelp that tried to escape from my throat.

As he looked up at the sky his hood fell off and I got my first good look at his face.

## 7 - chapter 7

### Chapter 7

I gasped. He wasn't old like I thought he had been. He looked at the oldest, seventeen. His longish black hair flopped over his brown eyes. He was...cute...I admitted to myself hesitantly.

His brow was furrowed, worried.

He looked down at me when I gasped and realized his hood had fallen off. He cursed softly and pulled it back up.

I looked down embarrassed. I hated this guy. He had drugged me and was completely rude and obnoxious. So why did my stomach drop even farther than it had when we took off from the ground?

"Sorry." He muttered angrily. "That wasn't supposed to happen,"

"Oh no, it's ok!" I protested before I realized exactly what I had said. "Umm...I mean it's ok, because I...uhhh...like seeing people's faces when I talk to them." I backpedaled, inventing wildly.

He stared down at me again, hovering in midair, his huge wings flapping steadily, keeping us in place.

After a few seconds he smiled and pulled the hood back down.

"There." he said and continued flying.

Much to my annoyance, I blushed.

We continued flying upwards and he continued to look worried. I finally gathered my courage and asked, "What's wrong?"

"This might hurt..." he said with his eyes trained on the sky.

I followed his gaze and saw the same bright blue sky that I had seen down on the ground. "What will?"

"This. Prepare yourself,"

I looked around, panicking. Wondering what exactly was going to hurt so much.

We then crossed over some invisible barrier and suddenly I knew what he was talking about.

Pain. Greater pain than I had ever felt before. Including the time I had to re-enter my broken body. I felt like a flaming dagger was being dragged across my entire being. All around us there were swirling black and gray clouds and smoky figures lurking in the corners of my vision. I remember screaming as the pain got worse and vaguely registered D.B.R.G. pulling me closer to him and wrapping his arms around my back.

Then it was over. I collapsed onto D.B.R.G. and breathed shallowly.

"You're really heavy you know," D.B.R.G. laughed in my ear. I bit back a smile and sat up, hating myself for being weak in front of him. I didn't know why I was so embarrassed but I was.

"Sorry." I panted shortly.

He set me down frowning. "Don't apologize for something that isn't your fault."

"Sorr-" I started but stopped at his glare. "Ummm...Ok." I said lamely.

"Now...Get up."

"Ok." I muttered.

I struggled a little getting to my feet, but wanted to stand without his help. At least I hadn't fainted again. I still had my dignity.

I stood and walked a few steps, and tripped over my feet. So much for being dignified.

I guess D.B.R.G. caught me because instead of hitting the ground I was stopped by his hands and was looking up into his face.

My own face, I'm sure, turned bright red and I nearly tripped again trying to get away. I brushed myself off and glanced up at him. He seemed to be choking but with closer inspection I realized he was

trying not to laugh at me.

## Chapter 9

It started raining as we walked together across large, grassy, rolling hills. It felt like something out of a Charlotte Bronte book. It was so cold I wondered why it wasn't snowing and I shivered in my short white dress. D.B.R.G. noticed and took off his cloak and wrapped it around my shoulders.

"Thanks,"

"No it's my fault. I forgot to get you the proper clothing for this level. It's always cold here." He himself was wearing a long sleeved blue shirt with long black pants and large hiking boots. He looked warm enough.

I pulled his cloak closer around myself and shivered again, flicking rain out of my eyes impatiently.

"So what exactly am I going to learn here? And who's going to teach me? And where are we? And-"

"Hey, one question at a time!" I paused, waiting expectantly.

He sighed and pushed his ink-black hair away from his eyes.

"You are going to learn the entire history of Heaven, Earth, and Hell."

I looked at him horrified.

He laughed at my expression.

"Just how long do I have to learn all of this?!"

"Not long..." he trailed off looking worried again. I was worried too. I had always been bad at memorizing dates and random facts.

"And as to who will be teaching you, that would be the Second Council Member."

"Does this person have a name?" I asked annoyed.

"Yes."

I waited.

"As to where we are," he continued ignoring my incredulous look, "Second Heaven."

And that was all I could get out of him.

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I stopped, staring. We had just come over a particularly large hill and sitting there in the middle of the moor was a huge mid-evil castle. It was tall, wide, and gray. Complete with a moat and drawbridge and small red flags flying from large towers.

"Ummmm...wow."

"Well come on!" D.B.R.G. said gesturing impatiently. I walked down the hill, almost tripping on the long cloak.

We walked up to the castle and since the drawbridge was down, we crossed the moat, the rain still falling into the water, making little ripples in the muddy liquid.

D.B.R.G. knocked three times on the huge wooden door.

He turned back to me.

"I'm going now. Uh bye." He said.

"What you're just going to leave me?!"

"Yeah I have to go do my shift."

"Fine. If that's more important than I am..." I said glancing up at him. He looked uncomfortable.

"Uh it's not that...I just have to...Ummm go."

"Fine. Go."

"Ok. I will." He shook open his wings and took off, droplets of rain falling from them and onto me.

"Wait!" I yelled up at him. He paused. "I don't know what to call you! What's your name?"

He stared down at me for a second.

"Mark. My name is Mark."

"Mark," I repeated to myself. "Ok! Bye!"

“See you soon! Good luck.” He then folded his wings and dived down into the ground and vanished. I stood there slightly shocked. I bent down and poked the ground to see if I could go through it too. It was solid. I couldn't.

I sighed and turned back to the door. I heard footsteps and waited to meet my teacher.

## 8 - chapter 8

### Chapter 8

The double doors flew open and there stood my new teacher.

I took a couple of steps backwards.

“Ahhhhhhello!” I changed my rather rude scream into a hello at the last second. I had a right to scream though. Why hadn't D.B.R-I mean 'Mark' warned me? I was excepting well, you know... something human?

What greeted me at the door was a man who looked, according to his body, to be in his early twenties. He had a huge hawk head perched on his neck. Complete with brown and white feathers and two round beady golden eyes. Those eyes were pointed in my direction of course. Where else would they be? He was wearing lot's of warm looking clothes. I shivered. I must look a right mess, with my soaking wet hair and dress.

“Hello there.” he said. He didn't sound unfriendly. “Well come inside! You must be freezing! That idiot. He could have given you some proper clothes.”

I suddenly realized that I still had Mark's cloak.

“Oh!” I said stepping over too the spot where he had gone to see if I could get the ground to take in the cloak.

“Oh it's ok.” The Second Council Member said, clacking his beak a little as he talked. “We pretty much have an unlimited supply of them. He won't miss it. We can call them out of the air when we need them. See?” He waved his hands and a pure white cloak appeared out of nowhere. He flung it over his shoulders and shook his head a little so his feathers shook too. “It's not magic, magic isn't real. It's just a complicated branch of science.”

“Oh.” I said again, not understanding in the least.

“Well come in! It's so cold and all you have is that self-centered idiot's cloak. I'll start a fire and cook something and we can eat and talk.”

“Ok.” I said stepping inside. I kind of liked this guy. He seemed really nice and friendly. Plus he was going to feed me.

He shut the wooden doors behind us and my eyes started to adjust to the dimness of the castle.

It was furnished just like I would expect a mid-evil castle would be. Big wooden furniture was all over all of the rooms. Huge thick rugs covered the hard stone cobbled floor. Tapestries were draped over most of the walls and there was at least one fireplace in every room.

“Hey! Wait!” I exclaimed. The Second Council Member turned to me.

“I'm Allison. What's your name?”

“I know what your name is.” He laughed. “Mine is Akhom. It means 'eagle' in Egyptian.” he said pointing to his head as if it wasn't obvious at all.

“Really? That's so cool!”

He looked at me for a few seconds and then burst out laughing.

“Your funny.” he said poking me in the shoulder. “Now come on! I'll start a soup. Do you know how to make a fire?”

“Ummmmmm...Maybe?” I had never done it before but how hard could it be? All you had to do was pile some wood and light a match right? Did they have matches here?

He laughed again. “I'll show you.” We were in the kitchen now. A fireplace, a smallish wooden table and a few chairs were placed in the room. The floor was that same cobbled stone look as in the rest of

the house. There were no carpets but the room had a cozy feeling to it. There were large clay pots and spoons and other food cooking implements hanging on the walls from small hooks. Akhom took down one of the larger pots and set it on the table. He also pulled out lettuce, some sort of dried meat, carrots, tomatoes, and other foods for the soup.

"You try to get that fire started." He said gesturing to the fireplace and taking out a knife to start chopping the vegetables.

"Right." I said going over to the fireplace. I squatted down next to the grate. I grabbed a few logs from the pile on the ground and placed them in the grate and looked around for a match. Locating one I struck it on the stone and tried to light the fire. I failed and the match went out.

"You need to start with smaller sticks before you put the bigger sticks on." Said Akhom glancing up from his soup making.

"Oh, ok." I said reaching for some smaller sticks.

After several tries I finally got it. I stood up and warmed myself on the flames.

"I'm no better than that no good, selfish moron!" Akhom suddenly burst out. "I haven't gotten you proper clothes!" He then ran out of the kitchen and left me alone by the fire.

"Oh! It's ok! I forgot too!" I yelled after him. I wasn't sure if he heard me or not. I pulled Mark's cloak closer around me. I could smell him on it. He smelled like vanilla and eucalypts leaves. I inhaled deeply and then stopped horrified. I took the cloak off and threw it across one of the chairs. No. I couldn't feel that way. It was pointless.

...So why couldn't I stop thinking about him?

## Chapter 11

Akhom returned shortly with long brown pants and a long-sleeved light blue, corset-ish shirt. He also had big hiking boots that laced up over the ankle. He left the room again so I could change. I slipped out of the old clothes and pulled on the shirt and the pants and the boots. I loosely laced the corset up so I could still breath, unlike the ladies in older times who deprived themselves of breathing so they could look skinny. I finished tying up my boots and straightened up.

"Akhom! You can come back now." I called, scooting closer to the fire.

Akhom entered and went back to the soup.

"Everything fits then?"

"Yep! Thank you so much!"

He laughed again. "You'll have to use Mark's cloak for a cape. I don't have any that are long enough." I glared at blue cloak that Mark had left here.

"Wonderful." I said under my breath.

"The soup is ready for cooking!" Akhom said, picking up the pot and setting it over the fire on two poles so it balanced there, cooking. "Now then..." Akhom sighed, stretching out on one of the chairs. "I haven't had company in so long."

I sat down in a chair by the table and, still cold and wet, grabbed Mark's cloak and wrapped it around me. I tried not to breath in through my nose for the first few minutes but eventually gave in. The sent of vanilla and eucalyptus wafted around me and I unconsciously breathed in deeper.

"So." I said staring at the steam rising from the cooking soup.

"So...Tell me about your life on earth."

"Um ok." so I retold my story. I told him about reading everything I could get my hands on and riding horses and how the chandelier in our living room made a beautiful pattern of light and shadows on our walls when it was turned on. I told him about my field and how I had gone there to read, draw, and sing even sometimes even though I hated singing around people. I told him about going to my cousin's farm and wandering through the gardens, picking blackberries and eating them until I was sick. I talked about my best friends and my family and how school had been going. I talked and talked until the soup was

done.

Akhom listened without comment. When I was finished, he got up and stirred the soup a few times and tasted it. Proclaiming it done, he took out a couple of rags and lifted the soup off of the fire and set it on a slab of wood lying on one of the counters.

“Will you get two bowls out of that cabinet please, Allison?” He gestured in the direction of one of the cupboards on the wall. “And spoons as well? They’re in the drawer below the bowls.”

I got the bowls and the spoons and set them on the table. Akhom poured out the soup and set the pot down on the counter. He also got a round loaf of bread and a knife.

We ate the hot soup in silence. I blew on a potato to cool it and watched the steam rise up from my bowl. The soup was delicious.

“You’re really good at making soup.” I complemented shoving more into my mouth and dipping a hunk of bread into the broth with my other hand.

“Thanks.”

“Do you live here by yourself?”

“Yeah.” he said sadly. “It wasn’t always like that. I had a wife and a daughter but...” he paused.

“Go on.” I pressed.

“Never mind.” he said, eating a carrot.

“Well at least tell me where you came from.”

He was silent. Looking at me he said, “Egypt. I was a normal human for the first few years of my life.” he gestured to his feathered head. “No beak. Just regular. I met Oseye and we married a few years later. Then we had little Sheriti and I was the happiest man around. Then- well...um then-” he rubbed his eyes. “I don’t want to talk about it. Sorry.”

“That’s ok.” I said wondering what had happened. “I’m sorry for, uh, whatever happened.” He laughed, shaking his head again.

“No it is completely my fault.” He stood up and cleared the table.

“Come on. I’ll show you to your room!” I grabbed my dress and sandals from where I had left them near the fire to dry and followed him out of the kitchen. We traveled up a flight of carpeted stairs and through a few hallways. He opened a wooden door and led me into the room.

“Good night!” he said. “If you need anything at all, don’t hesitate to call! I don’t sleep much. I don’t need to. I’ll start teaching you tomorrow after breakfast. Sleep well!”

“Thank you. You too.” he shut the door and I looked around the room. It had a smallish bed in a corner and a large window that showed an amazing view of the moors. The moon had risen and I went to the window to see it better. The silvery light bathed the long grasses on the rolling hills and turned them into a grayish-green color.

I don’t know how long I stood there. It might have been ten minutes, a half an hour, an hour, two? I finally sank onto the bed and crawled under the scratchy blanket. I fell asleep, fully clothed, almost at once but not before wondering what had happened to Akhom and his family and also what Mark was doing at this moment. I wrapped his cloak around me and slept in a cocoon of vanilla and eucalyptus leaves.



## 9 - chapter 9

### Chapter 9

“Uhhh...then that one guy created everything along with those other people and then chose heirs to keep ruling Heaven and greeting the dead. Those heirs would be the council members. The original council members then disintegrated themselves and turned into new matter.” I recited, screwing up my eyes trying to remember the bit of the History of Heaven I had just learned.

“Yeah. You are going to need to know those people’s names though.” Said Akhom.

“Right. Got it.” I said.

“No you don’t.” said Akhom patiently. We had been studying for the entire morning and most of the afternoon. Now the sun was setting and we had learned some of the History of Heaven. Akhom was now quizzing me on what we had gone over. It was actually pretty interesting stuff. I learned that when council member’s lifetimes in Heaven are over, they disintegrate themselves and form together to make new matter. That new matter goes onto earth and joins in with everyday matter. I also learned how Heaven was created and why. Akhom had been explaining that to me the entire day. He was being very patient with me. I kept stopping him and asking him questions. Every so often he would get up and pick out a book from the many shelves in the library we were sitting in and bring it back to the large desk we were sitting at. He made me read passages and explain them in my own words. It was all very completed.

“Ok,” he sighed, shutting a book after I had finally figured out what those people’s names were. “Time to eat dinner.” I realized how hungry I was as I hadn’t eaten all day.

I helped Akhom cook some chicken and we ate at the kitchen table again. I told him more about my life but when I pressed him, he told me nothing more about his. He just shrugged the questions off and changed the subject. He walked me to my room after we ate and I fell asleep again. I was sensing a routine in the making here.

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In the morning I woke up early and went in search of a bathroom with a shower. I found one and some towels and took my first shower in days. Gross huh? I dried off and put on my clothes again. I carried my towel back through the carpeted hallways and put it in my room. I then went downstairs to find Akhom and start studying again.

That day we learned about the History of Hell. I learned about the creation of Hell and of the one ruler of Hell. It was a man and a woman at the same time and could change it’s shape at will. It was advised by two other demi-gods of hell. One female and the other one male. I also learned about the different spellish things that they did. They had ones to make people forget what they are supposed to be doing, they had one that enabled them to control a person if they had their DNA, like a lock of hair or a fingernail or a piece of skin. Heaven had spells too of course but nicer ones like making a tree grow stronger, or making sure a mother gave a healthy birth and stuff like that.

Once again after we were finished with Hell, the day was pretty much over again. We once again cooked and ate dinner, talked a little and went to bed.

The next day we learned about the History of Earth. I learned how once the original main rulers of Heaven and Hell were once lovers. They decided to make a monument to their love so they created a huge green and blue sphere. Eventually plants and animals and humans evolved and made their homes on Earth. But Heaven and Hell started fighting over who would rule Earth. They almost killed each other but their friends from their homes stopped them at the last minute. Their hatred for each other grew and

grew and they passed on that hatred to the next generation. And the next. And the next. I studied and studied and slept and ate and talked. That was all I ever did. All of that learning stretched out for what felt like, at least three weeks. I had lost track. I went through the days in a fog, like a dream, trying not to think about anything but the lessons, not sure this was all really happening. But at night I couldn't help myself. I thought about Mark. I had just met this guy and he was a complete jerk but...well...I still wasn't ready to admit anything to myself yet.

Akhom insisted that we go back to Heaven, Hell, and then Earth again, saying that "we just covered the basics. You have so much more to learn." and indeed I did.

I learned everything about the original rulers' lives except what they ate for breakfast every morning. I remember during one day of hard studying I got so frustrated that I slammed my book down and walked out of the library.

"I can't do this! Find someone else! Why do I need to know all of this anyway? How is this going to help me?! I'm going back home."

I felt a hand wrap hard around arm and spin me around. Akhom stood there looking furious. He leaned over and bit my shoulder. His sharp beak sank into my skin as easily as if my flesh was warm butter. Blood welled up from the wound and stained my shirt.

"What did you do that for?!" I screamed at him.

"To remind you why you are learning this. Are you going to just walk away and let Earth, Heaven, and Hell crumble? Are you going to let everybody around you die without even trying to do anything? Are you just going to lay there and let yourself die? You need to know what I am trying to teach you so you can learn from the past. You need to know what the reason of this war. Do you know what the reason is?"

I was too scared to say anything so I just clutched my wound and shook my head.

"Hate. The reason is hate. If Heaven and Hell had just learned to forgive each other and not hold grudges for all of those years none of this would be happening. Kind of corny yeah? But true. We would be living in harmony and peace. You would probably still be alive. You have to understand this. You are the only one who can save us."

I stared at him. After a couple of seconds I started crying.

"I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I've been so selfish! I don't-" I wiped my eyes and stood up straight.

"I'm sorry. Let's go back to studying." I said in as clear of a voice as I could. I had gained a new resolve. No more breakdowns for me. I would work and learn and learn and do whatever it took to win this war.

"That's my girl." Akhom said, the friendliness returning to his eyes. "Now let's bandage up that arm and then we can return to studying."

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"We are finished here." Akhom said one day in the middle of a lesson. "I have nothing left to teach you."

I gaped at him. "But...I don't feel like I've learned all that much."

He laughed at me again. "Oh but you did! You learned the entire recorded history of Heaven, Earth, and Hell. We'll go to the council tonight and you can take your test."

"Where is the council's meeting place here?" I asked, feeling my heart rate go up. It had nothing to do with the upcoming test.

"In another, larger castle. It's pretty far away so would it be all right if we flew?"

"Yeah, that's fine."

"So we'll leave right before twilight." He turned his head toward me as he got stood up to start putting books back. "I'm going to miss you. I don't have company at all really."

"I'm going to miss you too." I said truthfully. "When this is all over and we both survive I will definitely come and visit you." I promised.

"I would like that." he said. "Now let's put these books away and go get something to eat."

We re-shelved the history books and walked down to the kitchen.

It was almost time to leave by the time we finished our hunks of bread and cheese. We walked outside talking about random stuff. Akhom felt like a brother to me and I really was going to miss him.

Was this how it was going to be? Would I keep making friends only to lose them? Never to see them until the war started?

"Ready?" he asked.

"No," I said.

He laughed again and I grinned nervously up at him.

"Let's go."

I heard that sharp cracking noise and Akhom's large, feathery, golden, hawk-like wings snapped out of his back. He grabbed my arms and we lifted off of the ground.

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"Hello, Allison."

"Hello, Mark."

I stood in a plain stone room in front of Mark, and Akhom.

"Where's the rest of the council?" I asked glancing around.

"On their respective levels."

"Ahhh..."

There was a pause.

"Oh!" I started, pulling off his cloak from my shoulders and holding it out to him. "Here's your cloak."

"Keep it." he said, gesturing to the new cloak on his back.

"Oh, ok."

"So let's get started," he said after an awkward silence.

\*\*\*\*\*

For the next hour I was bombarded with difficult questions about the history that Akhom had been teaching me that past week. Mark administrated the questions without the slightest pause or indication on whether I was right or wrong. I answered them as best as I could, hoping that I was doing alright. Finally it seemed as if Mark was finished. He shut his mouth and nodded.

"You pass." he said.

"Yes!" yelled Akhom, jumping up in the air. I beamed at him and then at Mark.

"Thanks," I said smiling even wider at him.

"Uh you're welcome." he said turning away.

"So, onward to the third level?" I asked.

"Yep. Ready?"

"I guess."

"Let's go."

I turned and ran to Akhom, throwing my arms around him. I felt the scar from his bite stretch and winced. I ignored the pain and pulled away from Akhom. I saw the sadness in his eyes.

"I'll see you soon." I said, "I promise you that." The words came out with such force that I surprised even myself. I hugged him again.

"Goodbye," I murmured.

"Farewell," he replied.

I walked away from him and stood beside Mark.

"I'm ready." I said even though I wasn't.

Mark's wings snapped out of his back and he grasped me around the waist and we were off.

\*\*\*\*\*

“So what am I going to learn on this level?” I asked, trying to make small talk.

“How to be the leader of a war. What to say to your troops. How to be brave enough to lead your army into battle.”

I gulped.

“Oh.”

He laughed and continued flying upward, the moors shrinking underneath us, the gray sky growing closer.

“I’m sure you’ll do fine. You were destined for this so I know you’ll be fine.”

“Destined?”

“Yeah, the only reason you were put on Earth was to lead us against Hell.”

“I know what ‘destined’ means.” I said annoyed. “Why me though?”

“Nobody really knows. All of this was up to fate.”

“How do you know I’m the one though?”

“You’ll find that out later in your training.”

“Oh come on!” I glared up at him.

“Sorry!” He laughed. “Oh, hey, get ready...”

“For wha-AHHHHHH!”

We crossed that invisible barrier again and several waves of pain crashed over me, drowning me. I screamed and closed my eyes tightly against the creepy shadow creatures lurking in the gray clouds. It was longer than the first time.

Finally it ended and we landed on solid ground.

I struggled to disentangle myself from Mark’s arms and get to my feet.

I wobbled unsteadily and Mark grasped my wrist, steadying me.

“Thanks,” I said weakly.

“You ok?”

“Yeah, I think so.”

I looked around.

“A city?” I asked Mark, confused. “I’m going to be taught how to lead my troops in an office building?”

“Yep.”

We started walking through the gray concrete city. The sky was a summer colored blue with only a few wispy clouds drifting across it. It was quite warm and a slipped Mark’s cloak off and draped over my arm.

“There’s the building we’re looking for,” Mark pointed to a building that looked identical to the rest of the buildings.

“Whatever you say.”

He held the glass door open for me. I smiled at him and walked inside, looking around at the high ceilings and plain gray walls.

“Now, what?” I asked turning around to face him. He was still standing outside.

“You coming or do you have to abandon me again?”

“Well, ummm...yeah.”

“Oh well, that’s fine, go right ahead. I’m sure I’ll manage somehow. Although I might trip without your help and fall into an empty elevator shaft and die horribly.” I said sarcastically.

“What?” He asked, shocked.

“I was kidding. God, calm down” I laughed at his terrified expression. “I’ll be fine I’m sure.” I assured him.

“Ok, well bye.” He unfurled his wings and, with one last worried look back at me, flew high and then arced back down to disappear into the ground.

## 10 - another chapter

I glanced around the room and saw a receptionist's desk. I walked over to it and seeing nobody there, paused uncertainly.

"Hello?" I called hesitantly.

No answer.

"Hello?" I called louder.

I glanced around on the desk and saw one of those silver bells you are supposed to ring to get somebody's attention. I reached out a tentative hand and tapped the bell once. The ringing echoed oddly in the silent room.

Suddenly the scenery changed drastically and I found myself in a large grassy field surrounded by frightened soldiers. Men and woman, some on horses, some on foot, all carrying weapons of some kind: swords, guns, bows and arrows...And all were staring at me. Waiting for me to say something. I looked down and found myself clutching the sword I had made under the instruction of Buzz.

"How did I get here?" I asked the nearest person who looked back at me shocked.

"What do you mean?" she asked, shaking her brown curls out of her eyes. "You were about to give a speech."

"I was?" I asked again, completely confused now.

The woman shook her head in shock, and turned to the man standing next to her and whispered something into his ear. I caught the words: "What does she mean?" and "...she gone crazy?" and "...don't have that much time..."

A voice shouted out a few yards away, "They're coming!" We all turned as one to see the green hills become black and red with the on-coming soldiers of Hell.

They got closer.

I could see their faces. Some were normal human faces, but others were twisted by being in Hell for so long that they were hardly recognizable.

They came closer.

They were only a few feet away now, yelling war cries and waving their weapons around.

One almost faceless creature came right up to me and slashed me from my shoulder to my hip, making a huge bloody gash across my chest with it's red sword.

I screamed and fell to the ground.

The creature from Hell leaned over me, grinning.

"Die. We have won and you can die knowing that it was all your fault."

It raised it's now bloody sword over it's head and plunged it into my chest, killing me immediately.

\*\*\*\*\*

"You failed, Allison. Which is fine for now because that is what I am supposed to teach you."

I opened my eyes to find myself standing in a gray carpeted meeting room with a large oak oval table.

Sitting in one of the chairs in a business suit was a man. He ran his fingers through his short blonde hair and stared at me with a small grin on his thin lips.

"Wh-what?" I stammered weakly.

"That was a test...a sort of a pre-test if you will, to see what you knew about leading an army now."

"And how did I do?"

"Terrible. You died in case you hadn't noticed."

I breathed deeply, trying to control my temper. The urge to yell at this guy was unbearable but I knew

that wouldn't get me anywhere.

"Ok."

"Good, Allison." He said in surprise. "You controlled your temper very well. If you lose your temper in battle and let your emotions break your concentration, you will get yourself killed and then where would all of us be?"

I gritted my teeth and balled my hands into fists.

"I'm Ted, by the way." he said, rising, and holding out his hand for me to shake. I did and he sat down again, motioning for me to do the same.

"I'll be teaching you how to be a good leader and at the end of the next few weeks you will take a similar test as the one you just took. The first things you will learn are the different parts of an army." He paused and glanced up at me, straightening his bright red tie. "Would you like to start now or do you need a night off?"

It was a challenge. To test my strength of character, I was sure.

"Let's start now." I said grimly.

A small smile appeared on his lips.

"Very well."

He stood up and pulled down a chart from mid air. It hung there on its own. I didn't even flinch. I was used to all of this by now. And I was too tired to care.

He pointed to the simple chart.

"An Army is made up of Corps." He gestured to the words on the paper. "Those Corps are made up of different Divisions. The Divisions are made up of different Brigades. The Brigades are made up of Regiments and these Regiments are made up of Companies. Every army is different. Some have two Corps and ten Divisions while others have five Corps and fifteen Divisions. As of right now your army has ten Corps. That's a lot of people and-What?"

"Nothing," I sputtered. I had jumped a little at the sentence, "Your army has ten Corps." That was huge!

"That's enough for tonight." Ted said giving me a strange look. "Have a bagel," he pushed a box towards me. I took one and ripped a chunk out with my teeth. "I'll show you to your room." he offered. I stood and he escorted me through the door.

## 11 - chapter 11

### Chapter 11

I woke with a start on a long black couch and forced myself into a sitting position. I ran my fingers through my tangled hair and forced it back into a ponytail, wrapping a hair-tie around the mess. I stood up and walked to the door of the office I had slept in last night, stretching and yawning. I reached for the gray door knob, but before I could touch it, it flung open to reveal Ted standing there, arms folded.

I gave another little jump and yelp, and clutched at my heart.

“Lesson number two:” Ted said glaring at me, “expect the unexpected. Now hurry up, kid.”

Kid? Kid?! Did he seriously just call me kid?! I was the girl that was going to save his freaking world and he dared to disrespect me like that?!

I took a few deep breaths, trying to control my temper as we walked down the boring gray carpeted hallways. It wouldn't do to lose my temper. I had to keep calm.

Ted opened a door and motioned me to enter.

“What I am going to teach you on this level is short but very important. You are the icon for millions of the dead. The entire future of Heaven, Earth, and Hell relies completely on your shoulders. If you show one sign of weakness, they will get scared and stop believing in you. Your performance on that first night you were here scared the people on the first level of Heaven. Mark managed to cover for you, saying that all of that was just to test whether the people believed in you. I am here to teach you that no matter what happens you can not show any signs of weakness. People are going to die again in this war. You have to expect that and not let your reluctance to risk people's lives get in your way of making decisions. You have to be strong and be able to make decisions quickly.”

I stared at him. He looked back at me, apparently awaiting an answer. I swallowed.

“Ok.” I said weakly.

“Now,” he said, opening the door to the hallway in which I had first entered the building with Mark. “I'm going to put you through a series of tests. After you take them I will go over all of your mistakes and you will correct them. Ring the bell.”

I glared at him for a second, took a deep breath, turned to the little silver bell, reached out a shaking hand and rung it. I breathed deeply again as the scenery changed again. I was standing on a stage, facing several thousand frightened looking people. They stretched from the black stage to out of the tall wooden doors that stood open. Some of the people were so close I could pick out each individual detail on their face. A mole here, a long beard there...Others were so far away that they sort of blurred into the back-round. I looked at the ones I could see more closely and found with a shock that I recognized some of them from history class.

Ok...why wasn't George Washington or Joan of Arc leading this army or talking to the people?!

They were all looking at me. Some lowly freshman girl from California. Andrew Jackson was looking at me. Expectantly. Waiting.

That's when I realized that I was expected to make a speech. Again. Great. Wonderful. Awesome.

Can't wait. Oh no.

I breathed again.

“People of, uh, Heaven:” I began awkwardly, my voice amplified to the very back of the crowd. “We are about to, um, fight the people of Hell to protect, um, ourselves, and, uh, the people of, um, Earth...I have been chosen to, uh, lead you and I, um, and I, uh...I, well, I have been going through training to, um, lead this army, which is huge by the way...well I suppose you all already know that being part of it...so

umm...I guess that I am saying that I believe in all of you people. I know we can win this war sooo...yeah. That's it."

A groan of disgust resounded through out the hall and I was transported back to the gray hallway with the bell.

"That was awful." Ted groaned again. "Well, actually it wasn't all terrible. You had some good points. It was all just really scrambled up and not confident enough. You also said 'uh and um' a lot." he continued, mocking my voice which last time I checked, wasn't that high or quite that annoying. I gritted my teeth.

"What should I have done?" I asked him looking him squarely in his green eyes.

"Well, you should have been more confident, articulate, and don't say 'uh' or 'um'. Try again."

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## 12 - Chapter 12

I spent the rest of that day going through speech training. I hated it. I just wasn't good at motivating people. I continued to see the disappointed and scared faces in the illusions and Ted kept yelling at me outside of them. But I never once lost my temper. I was proud of myself for that at least, I reflected as I sat in my couch that night, Mark's cloak wrapped around my shoulders. I breathed in deeply and massaged my head.

'Just get through each day and cry at night...' I whispered to myself. I didn't like being yelled at. I hated it actually... Back when I was alive if anybody yelled at me, I would just snap and would have to defend my pride. It got me into a lot of trouble at school especially. But I was getting better at it. I hadn't yelled at Ted at all yet.

I slid under the covers on the black couch and spread Mark's cloak over me again. I fell asleep almost as soon as my head hit the pillow.

It was hot. Really hot. I glanced around and took in the burning midnight black staircase below me and the equally dark path leading through an otherwise fiery field. The sky above was pitch black with a few red stars piercing the blackness. As I watched the flames on the ground flicker and glow crimson against the deep black behind them, a figure appeared at the top of the stairs. The figure wore a black cloak that covered its entire body and a hood that hid its face from my view. It started climbing down the spiral staircase, gracefully avoiding the burning railing and patches of flame that dotted the black stairs themselves. My focus shifted and suddenly it seemed as if I was floating behind the cloaked figure rather than floating above it. It continued to walk down the stairs and I followed the figure, drifting a good few inches off of the ground. The cloaked figure followed the flaming path, as I followed, glancing around every so often to take in the flames and noticing how odd it seemed to see no other people on this path and yet feel like every time I glanced in another direction, some shadowy creature slipped out of my sight and back to the darkness.

The figure soon came upon what it was looking for and paused in its confident walking to give a deep curtsy to three other cloaked figures sitting in three different black thrones, inset with blood red rubies. "You're Highnesses..." whispered the figure that I had followed here in a woman's voice, "I have brought it." She continued.

The figures gave no verbal response. The figure in the far left throne stood up and walked to the woman and stretched out a hand. I shuddered as the long, dull green beetle claw appeared from under the cloak, and grasped the small felt bag that the woman held out to the figures. The beetle creature handed the bag to the thing in the middle throne. The figure on the right of the middle tossed a few coins to feet of the woman. I shivered again as the figure's bull hoof hand slithered back into the cloak. The figure in the middle reached out to take the felt bag from the beetle figure. I was surprised to see that the middle figure had a normal human hand as opposed to a tentacle or something. Somehow though, that human hand was far more unsettling than the first two. The middle cloaked figure opened the felt bag and eagerly drew out a small lock of light brown hair.

"I have done what you said. Now please, hold up your half of the bargain: Give me back my brother." the woman asked in a trembling voice that overflowed with hope.

And then the middle figure spoke. Its voice was deep and low and although one being was speaking, it seemed as if millions of other voices were screaming along with him.

“And indeed, Emily, you have done very well. But we have more for you to do before we give your brother back to you.”