

# Chapter VI

In Chapter VI, the protagonist steps into the church, only to encounter Ashley Bing and Emma Flint, both dressed for a party and a painful reminder of her past at Hebron Middle School. Hoping to avoid them forever, she feels out of place as Ashley's gaze lingers on Will Junior, a boy she admires. Summoning her bravery, she confronts Ashley, who dismissively insults her. Ashley's remark embarrasses her, especially with Will present, but Fish, a friend, scowls at the bullying girls, showing his displeasure.

Will Junior, with a sympathetic smile, tries to ease the tension and reassures her that she's better off without friends like Ashley and Emma. He leads her away from the uncomfortable encounter towards the party room. The atmosphere in the room is underwhelming, decorated with sagging streamers and only a chocolate cake, indicative that people are still uncertain about the celebration.

As Will gives her a birthday gift—a pen set—she feels uncertain about the proper etiquette of opening it right away. They continue to the kitchen, where Bobbi and her stylish friends prepare refreshments. Bobbi's dismissive attitude towards the protagonist's birthday dress makes her feel younger and insecure, realizing she no longer felt special at thirteen.

Amidst the preparations, a peculiar sound calls for her attention, leading her to feel a strange clarity about her upcoming journey to Salina. As she contemplates and experiences a bizarre sensation, she accidentally knocks into Will Junior, causing chaos with a fallen tray of sandwiches. During the commotion, she notices Bobbi's tattoo, an angel with a mischievous grin, which ignites her curiosity and concern about how Bobbi obtained it.

The moment becomes surreal when the tattoo seems to come alive, speaking to her in a whisper that reveals the character's loneliness. Overwhelmed by the unfolding events and the unexpected communicative power of the tattoo, the protagonist faints, signaling a turning point in her experience and emotional state during this pivotal birthday gathering.