



## The Karma Chronicles, Part 1: Hadrian's Seal

**Pepper Carlson**

Balboa Press (Jan 25, 2017)

\$12.99 (152pp)

978-1-5043-7263-3

*The Karma Chronicles is a story of adversity and the search for places of belonging, making it an original rendition of painful subjects.*

Pepper Carlson's *The Karma Chronicles* is a creative and highly dramatic coming-of-age story with family conflict themes, including a search for biological family members. Vivid and full of painful life lessons, the novel features matters of karma and the connections between twins.

An inventive opening featuring cherubs and a grand, baroque-style ballroom sets the stage in Carlson's tale. The story is told from the perspective of a twin who has died but continues to watch over her sister, Kate, as her troubled life unfolds. Along with other protective archangels, the deceased twin cannot rescue or interfere with the surviving twin's karma debt, which she must pay for the misdeeds of her extended family.

Chapters with catchy titles like "Hershey's with Almonds" and "Crosstown Bus" offer an angel's-eye view of Kate's rocky youth. She escapes from unhappy days with a woman named Paige, initially identified as her mother, and her older sister Mia. At other periods, Kate also lives with her Aunt Janis, who has multiple-personality disorder, and later with her father, Alex, who subjects her to beatings until she escapes. Characters are fully developed and believable, and their often serious troubles create empathy, especially for the suffering Kate.

As she travels from the East to West coasts looking for a true sense of belonging and love, dealing with rotating boyfriends, bouts with overeating, and friends experimenting with drugs and alcohol, Kate is helped by the distant presence of her twin and other angels, who sing her to sleep with lullabies of optimism and hope.

Wince-inducing details of the recurring violence punctuate Kate's journey, as she is urged forward in her quest for inner peace. Even during slower passages that rehash variations of the same problems, this sympathetic style, paired with naturally delivered dialogue, contributes to the story's authenticity. Inventively written scenes hold attention throughout.

Explosive and shocking developments further grab attention, but the story reaches beyond them in its explorations of boundary-breaking issues, including humanity moving to higher levels of intelligence, choosing life over death, and taking responsibility for one's personal actions. Through Kate, the ways that families determine individual destinies become clear.

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ANDREA HAMMER (March 27, 2017)

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