

# Keeper of the Keys (A Tarot Tale)

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# Keeper of the Keys (A Tarot Tale)

## CHAPTER 1: The Heirophant

By *TheLibrarian* <[niki@mailinator.com](mailto:niki@mailinator.com)>  
1:56 AM on Sunday, July 25th 2004 CE

Weary of my throne, I seek solace in the keys of my office. Keys of all sizes and descriptions hang on a ring I keep always at my side, and each of them I recognize from the past. I am the keeper of doorways, after all; I have used each of these keys before.

But not all, it would seem! As I make my way through the ring, remembering the many worlds represented here, I find there are two keys that are unfamiliar to me. Either I have never had occasion to use them, or they have appeared here by magic.

I tell my servants, "I am leaving for a time. Guard the Temple in my absence."

They protest, but then, they do every time.

I brush them aside and approach the single door looming hugely behind my throne. I isolate the two keys and decide which one to use in its enchanted lock

**The big brass one with the square handle** (*Turn to Page 2.*)

**The tiny gold one with the ruby dust on its handle** (*Turn to Page 4.*)

**The plain one carved from some beautiful magical wood.** (*Turn to Page 10.*)

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "Just for fun, I'm pulling a Tarot card from the Rider-Waite deck to inspire each chapter. If this story is still up when I open the site to general participation, it would be neat if you'd do the same. Use playing cards if you don't have a Tarot deck."*

## CHAPTER 2: Two of Wands

By *TheLibrarian* <niki@mailinator.com>  
2:26 AM on Sunday, July 25th 2004 CE

Passing through the door, I notice the key disappearing from my hand. I am briefly alarmed. "But perhaps," I think, "the key that wasn't there before was not meant to be used more than once." Behind me, the door closes and vanishes. It is not part of this world.

I stand on a balcony overlooking... the entire world. There is no other way to describe it. Just by standing here, I can see everything there is to see on the planet! It's dizzying. If I turn my face a fraction of a degree, my view changes:

- a little girl shivers in a snowdrift outside a brightly lit mansion. She is obviously not dressed for the weather and has nowhere to go but the grave.

- a river crawls with sludge and muck. Ducks lie gasping on its banks. Upstream, a truck dumps a faintly glowing much into the turgid "water."

- a bulldozer approaches a filthy shantytown on the edge of a brightly glittering city. The slum residents run in all directions as the collection thin walls and leaky roofs they called home collapses into rubble.

I was wrong - I can't see the whole world. This enchanted balcony shows me only those scenes where injustice prevails, as though perhaps I were expected to do something about it. But what can I do?

I avert my gaze downwards, and the magical sights recede. Keeping my shoes in my peripheral vision I manage to see a series of stairs leading down from the balcony into the world.

*...The End?*

## Keeper of the Keys (A Tarot Tale)

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "Just sitting here with a Tarot deck, racking my brains and watching Adult Swim. What the hell is Stroker and Hoops, anyway?"*

## CHAPTER 2: Ace of Wands

By *TheLibrarian* <niki@mailinator.com>  
2:45 AM on Sunday, July 25th 2004 CE

Passing through the door, I notice the key disappearing from my hand. I am briefly alarmed. "But perhaps," I think, "the key that wasn't there before was not meant to be used more than once." Behind me, the door closes and vanishes. It is not part of this world.

Where I am now, is nowhere. I am surrounded by darkness, and I couldn't swear that I'm standing on anything solid. Is this the end of a world, or the beginning?

It would appear it's the latter. As my eyes adjust to the darkness, the shape of a young tree becomes clear. Well, no, there's no light, not even a low light, for my eyes to adjust to, so the tree itself is probably giving off the light. It's a quickly growing sapling, sporting every kind of leaf imaginable, and as it grows taller, the light spreads and illuminates the newly born world. In one direction I can see deserts, in another forests, and in another the sea glistens.

As the world tree grows taller and thicker, it flowers in hundreds of colors, every size from babies' breath to water lily, and then the flowers give way to more fruits than I know how to name.

**Let's go explore the world.** (*Turn to Page 5.*)

**Let's stay here and examine the tree.** (*Turn to Page 6.*)

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "So, we're in between two Sealab reruns. The theme tonight is, apparently, "Debbie's In Control." Hmm."*

## CHAPTER 3: The Moon

By *TheLibrarian* <niki@mailinator.com>  
3:09 AM on Sunday, July 25th 2004 CE

The night brightens with stars. Moonbeams paint the world silver. In every direction, this new world is beautiful - and terrible in its unfamiliarity. Now I know why I was given this key: I was willing to trade the weariness of routine and power for the terror of adventure.

The mountains beckon and repel simultaneously. Moonlight glistens on each slope and whitens the path that leads invitingly upward. But a new field of stars winks into existence: the eyes of countless shaggy beasts that guard the mountain stair. They do not growl. They do not raise their hackles. They merely watch and wait.

The sea sparkles, implying worlds beyond this world for those who can cross it. A boat lies in the tide, bobbing against the shore. And round about its prow the fins and scales of throngs of largely invisible water beings thresh the waters. Are they escort or enemy? From here there is no way of knowing.

The woods (as they say) are lovely, dark, and deep... and home to another field of patient stars.

The desert smells of mystery... and of privation, and the unknown.

Where to go? Which guardian to brave?

**I will climb the mountain stair.** (*Turn to Page 11.*)

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "And now it's the Inuyasha half-hour. My goodness. Will they every get sick of milking that "sit, boy!" so-called joke? And, really, how many times in 30 seconds is it really necessary to say "The night of the new moon"?"*



## CHAPTER 3: Three of Cups

By *TheLibrarian* <niki@mailinator.com>  
3:30 AM on Sunday, July 25th 2004 CE

Of course the tree does not stand alone. I knew better than to expect that. Where there is a tree of golden apples, there are the Hesperides and the three-headed serpent. Where there is a world tree, there is the eagle and the squirrel. Where there is a tree of knowledge, there is a snake and an angel with a flaming sword.

This tree is guarded, but the guardians seem friendly enough. A trio of sphinxes circle the great trunk, padding on lions' feet on a clockwise track, smiling welcoming smiles on their ladylike faces.

"Care to taste the fruit?" asks one. "Do you wish to smell the flowers?" Indeed, bud and fruit and flower mingle on one tree in the same season. And the guardians seem willing to share the bounty.

"This is a kind offer," I say, careful neither to accept nor refuse just yet. "What has this one done to deserve such generosity?"

"You are here. The tree is here. What more reason do we need?" One of the sphinxes leaves its track and approaches me. "The centuries spread long ahead of us. Why not begin them in peace?"

"It is good that beginnings have witnesses," says another from ten feet up the trunk. These sphinxes have extraordinary climbing ability. She stands on the bark as if it were the ground.

"I will carry you to the highest branches where you can sample the fruit and the view at once," says the sphinx standing beside me. "Honor us by accepting?"

**I will do it.** (*Turn to Page 8.*)

## Keeper of the Keys (A Tarot Tale)

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "Yay! Inuyasha is over and Wolf's Rain is next. I'll probably stop here for the night and go back to working on code."*

## CHAPTER 4: Eight of Wands

*1:25 PM on Monday, July 26th 2004 CE*

Like her compatriots, the Sphinx beside me is not very large. In size she resembles more a great dane than a horse or even a pony. But when I settle at her invitation upon her lioness's back, she shows no sign of strain but merely walks back towards the Tree.

The gait of a Sphinx is not like that of any beast of burden familiar to humankind, except to those few lucky ones who have had occasion to ride on the back of a great Cat. The softness of the paws translates into a very smooth motion. Even when she is not hunting, the Cat moves with great stealth.

"You are a very polite passenger," she says as we near the Tree. "I am much obliged, but I would prefer you not fall off." I am silent in my confusion. She adds, "Pray wrap your arms about my neck, friend, and hold tight with your knees. We go straight up." You see, my awe at being allowed to ride on the back of such a fantastic Creature is such that I touch her as lightly as I can, sitting straight up and fearing to lay hands where they might not belong. It's not just the usual propriety concerning the Sphinx's human, female anatomy; it's the same sort of shyness that would make you ashamed of clinging to a unicorn's mane. This Beast is made for loftier things than carting mortals about.

Her advice is well given. Our trajectory takes a ninety degree turn, and I would have fallen flat on my back right then had I maintained my modest aloofness. I cling, elbows desperately bent, to her shoulders, and squeeze with my legs so tight that I expect her any moment now to have trouble breathing. Thus our ascent into the lofty branches of the tree rushes by in a mixture of wonder and terror.

The branches seem to part for us as we climb. My Mount's claws make no sound as they propell us up that barky road, and the Tree makes no

protest at the prickles. Brilliant colors flash to either side of me, and the scent of the varying flowers along with our great speed makes me dizzy. I begin to feel as though I am nearing some climax that has nothing to do with the top of the Tree; I sense that this journey is the aim and culmination of my entire life.

At last, too soon, we come to stand in the crown of the Tree. Ten more feet of the trunk rises above us, splitting into two branches that split again and again in the way of deciduous trees. We are supported where two thick branches leave the main trunk and stretch off beyond my power to see.

"I can go no further," says the Sphinx. "Further up or out and the Tree will not bear my weight. But you can go a ways more, if you are brave and nimble."

Glistening several lengths in any direction are the fruit of the tree, shimmering in their range of colors, ruby apple-pears and golden apricot-mandarins, something like a blue papaya, something else like a violet mango, and nothing standing between them and myself but the terrifying unassisted climb.

"If I fall," I whisper, "will anyone catch me?"

"Had you fallen from my back, one of my sisters would have seen you safe to the ground." But she does not offer a similar guarantee against a fall from the Tree itself.

I sit motionless astride the Sphinx, sensing the inexplicable friendliness she has shown thus far leave her like a mask or a glamour, and I am aware once more of her alien nature. I wonder if she cares left or right whether I die here. I wonder if I have the courage to reach the fruit.

...*The End?*

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "From Waite's PICTORIAL KEY TO THE TAROT: "The card represents motion through the immovable--a flight of wands through an open country; but they draw to the term of their course. That which they signify is at hand; it may be even on the threshold.""*

## CHAPTER 2: Eight of Wands

By SunWolf <ccsunwolf@mailinator.com>

6:30 PM on Thursday, September 2nd 2004 CE

The door opens to a cool moonlit night. As I step forward and turn a 360 to take in the forest glen I have arrived in, I see the door fade away in a soft swirl of mist. "No turning back now" I think to myself...but then that was why I tried the new keys to begin with, to be "somewhere else".

So I turn a 360 once more, this time much slower. The moon is full. The trees that ring the large glen are wreathed with mist bathed silver with the moonlight.

Behind me, to the South where the door had been, is a path leading away into the forest. It is a well maintained path, carefully edged with Amethyst clusters. The surface is carpeted invitingly with fallen leaves. The mist in the trees to either side seems reluctant to encroach upon the path.

Ahead of me, near the North edge of the glen, is a small pool. The moonlight shimmers brightly on its surface. Soft splashes can be heard that suggest fish enjoy its cool depths. Beside the pool is a small dragon that appears to be carved from Amethyst.

*...The End?*

*ABOUT THE AUTHOR: "My favorite meditation journey. Where will it take you??"*

## CHAPTER 4: The High Priestess

*By small-tomes <kjackson@mailinator.com>  
11:35 PM on Saturday, September 11th 2004 CE*

As I climb the stairs, the constellations of eyes watch my progress. No creature disturbs me on my way. I occasionally hear the small sounds of feet or paws as the owners of the eyes move along with me. The moon and stars shine on the path, making it clear to see. A white river in the darkness reflecting the celestial glow.

I finally reach a small alcove set back into the hillside on one side of the path. Two tall shapes flank the dimness within. One is a pillar which glows faintly white the twinkle of stars. The other shape is a deep darkness that swallows the light of the night. The similarity of shape leads me to believe, that this too is a pillar.

Beyond the forms of light and dark, a depth beckons.

**You move forward, entering into the alcove** (*Turn to Page 12.*)

## CHAPTER 5: Six of swords

*By small-tomes <kjackson@mailinator.com>  
11:44 PM on Saturday, September 11th 2004 CE*

As you step into the alcove, you see a woman sitting there. Draped in blue, she watches you. In her hands is a paper with writing on it. Her feet rest on a crescent moon.

As you stand before the woman, the dimness beyond her brightens in a small spot, and for a time you see a boat moving away from you. In it sit a woman and small child with their heads bowed as from great fatigue or weeping. A man stands in the stern of the small boat, pushing it through unseen water with a long pole.

*...The End?*

