

Part 1 : Awakening

Chapter 1

The colors of the watercolor painting started to blur together in front of Lisa. Brown hair waved in the air. Jade eyes looked down. The woman's white robe just needed some finishing touches. Her wings expanded over floating castles. *Hopefully the public will like this at the gallery.* Unlike Lisa's last painting, which didn't even get a glance. It was an abstract painting of many colors; she'd thought it was good, but the public had other opinions. *Funny how I dreamt of this woman a few nights ago,* she thought, writing a name below the angel: *Celestina.*

Lisa stood back to admire her work. Her body tingled just looking at the angel's pixie face staring down at the city she was charged with. *I'm so tired, I should stop for tonight. But I only have a few touch ups left.* Taking her thin paint brush and dipping it in the brown paint on the pallet, Lisa hovered over Celestina's hair when a child crying next door made her hand jolt. She scrutinized her apartment wall. Lisa shook her head and went back to her painting. A few moments later there was a knock on her door. Lisa stopped painting, left the bedroom and went downstairs. *That time already?*

Lisa crossed the living room to the front door and opened it. There stood her sister, Sara, soaked through from the rain. Sara's gold bangs stuck to her forehead and water dripped from her straight long hair onto the balcony.

Sara stood tall and slim. Her eyes were accentuated with dark blue mascara that now ran down her face.

"Hey, sis," Lisa said, while Sara gave her a hug.

Sara turned toward the stairs. "Come meet your aunt, Kristy."

Lisa looked around the door to see a young girl, around fourteen climbing the steps, dragging a suitcase. When Kristy stopped at the door, Lisa saw a young Sara that reminded her of herself four years ago. Kristy's brown hair was tied back in a ponytail. Her sparkling eyes made her skin light up, If only she didn't have a crease on her face.

"Hi, Kristy. I'm Lisa," she held out her hand.

"Hi," Kristy said solemnly, without extending her hand.

“Don’t be rude, Kristy,” her mother said.

“That’s okay. Why don’t you come in?” Lisa said.

“Could you just watch TV or listen to your ipod while I talk to your aunt?”

“Sure.” Kristy sat her suitcase down then plopped on the couch.

“Can I get something to drink for you two?” Lisa asked.

“I’ll have a Sprite,” Kristy said, putting her headphones on.

“None for me,” Sara said, looking at the painting of a park hanging on the wall.

Lisa handed Kristy a can. “I made some tea. I was hoping it would keep me awake.” She told Sara.

“Sure.” Sara sat at the kitchen table and Lisa handed her a cup. “Did you paint that?”

“I did,” Lisa said, looking at a multi-colored painting on the wall, sipping her tea. “I tried to sell it at the gallery where I work but no one seemed interested so my manager had me take it down.”

“I’m sorry.”

“It’s okay. I’m working on something better.”

“I shouldn’t ask you to do this. Especially when I haven’t seen you in years. I’m sorry I haven’t called. I’ve been moving around. I just don’t know who else to turn to. I don’t think our parents have forgiven me yet.”

“That was eight years ago. Now you’re getting help,” Lisa said. “They will.”

“I’m surprised you said you would take in Kristy for me,” Sara looked down. “Especially after the things I’ve said to you.”

“That’s what families do. We forgive.” Lisa held out her hand and her sister took it. Something doesn’t feel right.

“About Kristy staying for six months. Um, well...it might be longer.”

“Longer?” Lisa whispered. “How much longer?”

“Er...let’s say a year or longer.” Sara swallowed and tried to avoid Lisa’s glare. “I just need time to put my life back together.”

“Your life...what about my life?” Lisa spat.

Sara wiped an eye. “I need someone to look after her. I don’t want her following my path.”

“Doesn’t she have any other place to stay?”

“I trust you. I don’t want her to go into the system or to our parents. I don’t know what they’re like anymore.” Sara rested her hand on top of Lisa’s.

Lisa’s eyes softened. She sipped her tea then sighed. “I’ll do it for her.”

“I’ve already enrolled her in school. I’ve also slipped in an envelope that has money and a letter to her in her suitcase. I can’t bear to tell her now.”

Sara hugged Kristy and told her she’d return in six months.

“Why can’t I stay with my friend Holly in LA?” Kristy whined.

“Your friend isn’t an adult. She is,” Sara said pointing to Lisa.

Kristy gave her mother a hug. She looked at Lisa then shook her head. “Thanks, you’re an angel, sis.”

Lisa had a queasy feeling as she watched her sister descend into the darkness. Like she wasn’t coming back. Thunder boomed overhead, off in the distance, approaching fast.

Lisa put Kristy in the bedroom upstairs in her painting room. “That’s a nice painting,” Kristy said.

“Thanks,” Lisa said while cleaning up her paintbrushes. “Why does my mom have to go out of town for her drug treatment?” Kristy asked putting her purse down.

“Because New York has the best drug program,” Lisa said, unfolding the couch into a bed; she then put Kristy’s suitcase on it.

Kristy stared at a framed picture on the dresser of the two sisters. “Were you close?”

“Not really. She moved out with our father at sixteen when I was seven.” She coughed. “Well, everything in this room is yours.”

“Can I take a shower?”

“Of course. It’s your pl—place too,” Lisa replied, swallowing. “Just don’t touch the paintings or supplies, please.”

While Kristy was in the bathroom, Lisa wondered if she should do what her sister couldn’t and tell Kristy the truth. Lisa searched for the envelope. Five hundred dollars and the letter along with papers to sign for permanent custody.

Lisa's hand began to tremble. *How am I going to tell Kristy?*

"I haven't been here for five minutes and you're already going through my stuff?" Lisa turned around to find Kristy at the doorway wrapped in a towel.

"I—I don't know how to tell you—"

Kristy grabbed the letter from her and read it. She stood frozen, the paper shaking in her hand. She collapsed onto the bed. "Why?"

Lisa sat next to her and rubbed her back. "Your—your mom is just trying to do what she thinks is best for you." She didn't know what else to say, but she was sure more needed to be said.

Kristy's tears flowed. "What did I do?"

Lisa wiped her own eyes. Definitely more needed to be said. *Now it really is your place.*

* * *

The next morning, neither one knew what to say to one another, so Lisa dropped Kristy off at school. Looking at her clock, she knew she'd have to learn to wake up earlier. Kristy takes more time in the bathroom than I do. At least it gave me time to finish up my painting. After getting her painting out from the trunk of her car, Lisa entered the small building across from the other shopping malls in the promenade. She never thought she would be late for work. Never thought she would have a roommate. Can't believe my sister would do this to me! She wanted to scream and hit something. Lisa pushed opened the door with her back, causing the entrance bells to ring.

"Morning, Maggie," Lisa said.

"Hey Lisa," Maggie said, she wore a black vest jacket and suit pants to match, and she came out from around the cashier counter to hold the door open. After Lisa brought in the painting she leaned it on a wall and unveiled it. Maggie gasped. "That's so beautiful!" Her blue eyes sparkled in the fluorescent lighting. Maggie looked around on the fabric walls that gave the gallery a cozy feeling. Paintings of huge sea ships that came out toward you. Cities lit up at night. Lisa followed Maggie around a corner under some darkened art lights. On the wall hung nature paintings, the lights highlighting certain areas of grass and trees. She found a blank spot. "I think this would be good. People will see it when they walk in so maybe it'll have better luck." Maggie took the painting of the angel and hung it up. "I like it."

"Thanks," Lisa said, "even my niece liked it."

“You babysitting?” Maggie asked.

“No. She’s fourteen. Last night my sister asked me to take in my niece for a few months.”

“A few months?” Maggie asked. “Now that’s a commitment.”

“That’s why I was late. Waiting for her to get out of the bathroom. It’s going to be tough times ahead.” Lisa looked at her painting with her arms crossed. “I have a good feeling about Celestina.” Not to mention a strange one as well.

Lisa and Maggie proceeded to open up the store. Lisa pinned her gold nametag onto her vest pocket. People were starting to come in and look around while some others looked in the window but kept walking. A couple with a child asked Lisa if there were paintings of ships and she pointed them in the right direction. While the parents looked at the paintings the child roamed around while Maggie watched her every move. *I don’t know why she doesn’t put up a “KEEP AN EYE ON YOUR KIDS” sign.*

A tall man in a trench coat strolled by the window, his collar turned up against the wind. He stopped and looked back at the window with his shades on. It seemed he was staring right at Lisa. He stepped inside and strolled up to the counter. She considered herself tall, but she had to crane her neck to see his Adonis-like face. “How may I—” The man removed his shades, revealing jade green eyes. Lisa forgot what she was going to say.

“Um, is there a restroom I can use?”

She pointed him toward the back. She eyed his short black hair above his broad shoulders. Where did he come from? Lisa began filling papers in a drawer. Lisa noticed that the girl had started to trowel around, but that Maggie was keeping an eye on her without being obvious about it. The guy with the shades returned and, walked up to the desk. “Can I ask you something? Who did that painting of Celestina?”

“That would be me,” Lisa said.

“Lisa Gale,” he read off her nametag. “Very elegant. Looks so real. I’m Joe. I just moved here.”

Lisa held out her hand. “I hope you like it in our little Haven City.” She smiled. Can I be your personal tour guide? “And what do you do?”

“I’m a mechanic. I work out of my garage for right now. I was just getting some spare parts when I needed to stop. I’m glad I did because I wouldn’t have gotten to see your painting. I need to go, but I’ll be back to see what else you’ve painted.” Joe’s trench coat swept the brown carpet as he headed toward the door. “I like your red hair by the way, it means you’re a fighter. You can take life when things are rough.” Then he slipped out the door. *He felt so familiar when I touched him. Like I was someone else.* A shatter from the back made her spin around. Lisa grabbed the

broom and dustpan then entered the back to find a small snow globe in pieces on the floor with a small painting that was inside. As she picked up the pieces she glanced at the mother talking to the girl, who apologized to Maggie. Next to the girl Lisa saw a glowing cloud of an orb. It vanished instantly. Lisa stared in awe, then shook her head. Coming out of her trance, she finished cleaning up the mess, thinking that she had never seen anything like that. A few minutes later the customers gave Maggie some money and left.

Lisa dusted off the artwork in the store. “So, um, about that girl...” *Did you see anything strange?*--she wanted to say. “I mean globe, at least we have more, right?”

“Of course,” Maggie said.

“The painting inside the globe is a popular item by a local artist, isn’t it?” Lisa asked.

“Yeah. He’s gotten huge everywhere.”

Lisa’s heart raced. *I would love to be like that someday.*

At midday, Lisa called Kristy on her cell phone to see if she needed a ride home but she said she’d walk. Hanging up the phone, something caused her heart to stop cold. From the store’s doorway, someone in a black hooded-robe stood, gazing at her. She hadn’t heard the door chime at all. The few customers in the gallery did not seem to see the robed figure either. She looked back at the spot but the figure was gone. Had she really seen the ghostly image? Maybe it was stress from everything. Not getting her painting sold, her sister leaving her with Kristy and all on top of starting this new job.

After work, she headed to her car. Stepping outside, a chill crawled up Lisa’s spine, and it wasn’t the cool air. Four men emerged from the darkness.

“The Master wants you dead,” a man in the middle said. He was dressed in black with a silver hoop in his eyebrow. One man behind him wore ripped jeans while another had a knife in his hand, grinning. All were tall except the last man who was medium build. He had gold chains dangling from his scrawny neck.

A foul stench filled the air. “What?” Lisa asked stepping backward. She gripped her purse in one hand and made sure her keys had the sharp edge sticking out. She had two weapons ready. Her ears started pounding.

A man appeared in front of them blocking her path. It looked like the guy she’d met that morning, in the shop.

“Jo—Joe?” Lisa asked, swallowing.

Joe glanced at her. A glance that told her to run, but she froze.

“This doesn't concern you,” the guy with the earring said.

“It does now,” Joe said, with a poker face.

“Get him.”

Lisa watched in horror. It looked like a film playing out in front of her. A blade materialized in Joe's hand as the guy with the knife rushed him. Joe stabbed him in the chest,

instantly killing him. The second guy with ripped jeans came charging from behind. Joe kicked backwards, causing the guy to slam onto the ground. Joe yanked the knife out of the man's chest before him as he fell, spun and kicked the approaching man who wore the chains, then turned and threw the knife into his neck.

Lisa felt her breath catch in her throat. *Have I finally snapped?* Then she heard Joe's voice.

“Behind you!” He stood inches away, slid his bloody knife to her on the ground. Lisa quickly picked it up, turned around and slashed the side of a fourth man's face, adrenaline coursing through her veins.

The man in black flinched, touching his face in pain. “Bitch! Kill her!”

A fifth man, with spiked hair, stepped out of the shadows. He ran up to Lisa and was about to strike, but Joe appeared in front of him.

Lisa dropped the knife and backed up on stumbling legs. Her hands were beginning to shake. She clenched them together forming fists. Must have been something I ate, she thought, trying to remember to breathe.

“You think you're going to kill me too, do you?” the man with spiked hair taunted, circling Joe.

Joe slipped his hand under his long coat. “I don't think,” he said. “I know.” Before the man could do anything, Joe brought his hand out holding a sword and slashed the man's neck. Joe looked at the sheen of blood dripping off his weapon. “Made me ruin a good sword.” Joe looked at the last guy standing, whom Lisa had cut. “Your turn.”

“You don't get it,” the guy in black said. “When we get the Heart there will be nothing but hell, and you can't do a damn thing about it.” He merged into the darkness.

Lisa stood there, unable to say anything. She wanted to run but couldn't. Joe's sword dissolved into the air. He then waved his hand over the ground. The bodies seeped into the pavement along with the blood. Lisa gasped. He had erased the nightmarish scene. No sign that any fighting had ever taken place. Not even a drop of blood.

“What?” Lisa felt like her mouth couldn't move along with her body. “Who are you?”

Joe waved his hand across Lisa's eyes.

Lisa blinked, feeling like she had come out of a daze, not remembering anything of the strange men or Joe's quick rescue. How long had she been standing in the parking lot? She thought she smelled sulfur but couldn't determine the source. She got in her car and gripped the steering wheel. Turning on her high beams, she merged into the heavy traffic of Haven City and drove off. She hoped this sort of staring episode didn't occur around Kristy. *I'm supposed to be taking care of her. I can't let her down.*

* * *