Lila’s Visions

by Drake Hay

# Chapter 1: A New Path

In the heart of a bustling city, there was a hidden garden that only a few knew about, where time seemed to stand still. At the foot of its central tree sat a man, wise and old, eyes closed, silent and still, his silk robes falling to the stone-brick ground beneath him. He was known as the Guardian of Stories, keeper of ancient tales that held the power to change destinies and unlock secrets buried deep within the hearts of those who sought him. Most rode him off as crazy, and thus the garden was dismissed into obscurity along with him in the minds of those in the city.

But one day, a curious young girl named Lila stumbled upon the garden while chasing a fluttering butterfly, and her wide-eyed wonder brought new life to the forgotten sanctuary. From behind a pillar, she hid from the man and watched for minutes in anticipation. Eventually, her curiosity got the better of her, and she took a tentative step forward, her small voice breaking the silence, "Who are you, and what stories do you guard?" The man turned and looked at her with the warmest of smiles, "My child, I guard nothing. Come, sit, I have something to show you." As Lila approached, he gently extended his hand, and with a subtle flick of his fingers, a soft glow emanated from the ground, revealing intricate patterns and symbols that danced in the air like wisps of light.

Lila's gaze was a gasp at the impossible little miracles dancing around in front of her, lighting her up with joy inside, as the reflection of little dancing blue sprites bounced off of her startled eyes. The Guardian chuckled softly, "These sprites are the keepers of stories, my dear. Each one holds a tale from long ago, waiting to be shared with those who dare to listen."

"Who are you?" said Lila. "Will the sprites speak to me? I'll dare to listen, I will!" Lila said, almost tripping over her words. The Guardian nodded, his eyes twinkling with wisdom. "I am merely a storyteller, a bridge between the past and the present. The sprites will speak to you if you open your heart and mind to their whispers." He closed his eyes, and the blue sprites began to hum a melodious tune, filling the air with an enchanting rhythm. A look of confusion and despair touched Lila's young face as she worked her brain to try and understand what the man's words meant. Sensing her uncertainty, the Guardian placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder and whispered, "Just trust in your own heart, Lila, and the stories will reveal themselves to you."

The man's words were comforting to Lila, and for whatever reason, she trusted him fully, despite only just having met him. As she closed her eyes and took a deep breath, Lila felt a warm, gentle breeze envelop her, carrying with it the faint whispers of the sprites' stories. Visions crossed her inner eye, visions of a beautiful planet, filled with marvellous and impossibly intricate technology woven into the land itself. As the visions unfolded, Lila felt a deep connection to this mysterious world, sensing that its secrets were intertwined with her own destiny.

She saw mountains of gold, hills of impossible height, sages of incomprehensible wisdom, an ancient world, long ago. The whispers guided her further into the vision, revealing a prophecy that spoke of a young girl destined to uncover the lost knowledge of this ancient world and bring harmony to her own. She then heard a voice that addressed her by name. "Lila, you are the chosen one," the voice said, echoing through her mind with a gentle yet powerful resonance. "Though you do not remember your spirit's life, you have anticipated your physical form here for aeons." Lila's heart raced as the voice continued, "Your journey begins now, and the wisdom of this ancient world will guide you in fulfilling your destiny. Trust in your intuition, as your ancestors are always with you."

As the vision faded, Lila opened her eyes to find the Guardian smiling at her, his expression filled with a mix of pride and anticipation for the journey that awaited her. "Ah, my little friend, go now, a bright future awaits you." With a heart full of newfound purpose, Lila nodded to the Guardian, then turned and walked back into the bustling city, carrying the secrets of the hidden garden and the ancient stories within her. She whizzed through the streets of her Korean city which she had passed through a million times in her life. Her heart raced with excitement and purpose, knowing that the secrets of the hidden garden and the ancient stories would guide her in ways she had never imagined before. That which she carried home with her that day was not rational, as if visionaries and dreamers alike ever were anything of the sort. Instead, it was a gift of insight and wonder, sparking a fire within her that would illuminate the path to her true calling, guiding her steps with the wisdom of the ancients.

As Lila walked through the bustling streets, the noise of the city seemed to fade into a distant hum, replaced by the faint, melodic whispers of the sprites that now echoed in her mind. As she turned the corner to see her mother cooking dinner in their home, the voices left, telling her that all is well, she is being guided and nothing stands in her way, whether she remembers it or not. Lila paused at the doorway, her heart still racing from the encounter in the hidden garden, and for a moment, she wondered if her mother could sense the change in her—the newfound purpose that now burned quietly within her.

Nevertheless, she walked through the door, because along with that purpose came a sense of acceptance and willingness to allow the pieces to fall where they may. Her mother glanced up from the stove, a warm smile spreading across her face, and for the first time, Lila noticed how her mother’s eyes seemed to hold a quiet knowing, as if she, too, had once carried secrets from a hidden garden. Whether it was the same or not, who can say? But before Lila could ask, her mother turned back to the simmering pot, humming a tune that sounded eerily similar to the melody the blue sprites had sung in the garden. Lila retreated to her room at the end of their tiny hallway before dinner to collect her thoughts and ground herself after the experience.

As she sat on the edge of her bed, the faint glow of the setting sun filtering through her window, she noticed something she had never seen before—a small, intricately carved wooden box tucked beneath her pillow. As she opened the box, the light in her room flickered. Inside, she found a delicate silver pendant shaped like a tree, its branches twisting into symbols that matched the patterns she had seen dancing in the garden. There were letters in the box also, obviously old and kept as keepsake. The letters, yellowed with age and fragile to the touch, bore her mother’s name on the envelopes, and as Lila carefully unfolded the first one, she realised they were written in a language she didn’t recognise—yet somehow, she could understand every word.

Lila scanned the foreign symbols, which read, "My Lila, if you are reading this, then you are ready." Her hands trembled as she continued reading, the words revealing a truth she had never imagined—her mother had once been the Guardian’s apprentice, and the garden’s secrets were tied to their family’s legacy. The symbols continued, explaining that Lila's lineage is one of few that remain from a lost civilisation that was destroyed millennia ago. The letter went on to describe how their ancestors had safeguarded the ancient wisdom of that civilization, passing it down through generations, and how Lila’s discovery of the garden was no accident—it was her birthright.

Lila struggled to process these revelations, but it did not matter, because dinner was ready.

Her mother’s voice called from the kitchen, pulling her back to the present, and Lila carefully tucked the pendant around her neck, feeling its weight as a quiet reminder of the path now unfolding before her. Dinner was particularly delicious that night. As they ate, Lila studied her mother’s face, searching for hints of the woman who had once walked the same path she now found herself on, but her mother’s expression remained calm and unreadable, as if she were waiting for Lila to speak first. Lila hesitated, but gave into the cue, "Mother…" Her mother looked up, her eyes softening with a knowing smile, and said, “I’ve been waiting for this day, Lila—tell me, what did you see in the garden?”

Lila's doubts quickly vanished as she relished in recounting the events of the day. She described the Guardian, the blue sprites, the visions of the ancient world, and the prophecy that had called her by name, her words spilling out in an eager rush as her mother listened intently, her smile growing wider with each detail. A concerned look filled Lila's face, as a question that had obviously been weighing on her throughout the day, crossed her mind, "But Mother, I have to ask... why the secrecy?" Her mother set down her chopsticks, her expression turning serious yet gentle, and replied, “Because, my dear, the world is not yet ready to remember what was lost—and until it is, our role is to protect the truth, even from those who might misuse it.” Curious, Lila's concern became intrigue, "Who? Who would misuse such a thing?"

Her mother’s gaze darkened slightly as she leaned forward, her voice dropping to a whisper, “There are those who seek power, Lila—people who would twist the ancient wisdom for their own gain, just as they did long ago, leading to the fall of the very civilization we are sworn to protect. They have no name, we never saw them, not once." Lila’s mother paused, her eyes distant, as if recalling a memory she had long tried to forget, before adding, “But they leave traces—subtle signs, like shadows at the edge of a dream, and we must always be vigilant.” Lila appeared not to be content with this answer, replying, "but Mother, who *are* they?"

Her mother sighed deeply, her hands clasping together as if to steady herself, and said, “They are the Forgotten Ones, Lila—those who turned away from the light of wisdom and chose instead to chase power, even if it meant destroying everything in their path.” She paused, then added softly, "we choose not to refer to them unless necessary. You must understand, my child, the things they did, the treacherous, horrible things..."

Lila felt a chill run down her spine as her mother’s voice trailed off, the unspoken horrors hanging heavy in the air, and for the first time, she realized the weight of the responsibility now resting on her shoulders. Lila considered asking further, but no further description was needed, imagination was far enough. Instead, she nodded silently, her appetite fading as the gravity of her mother’s words settled over her like a shadow, and she knew that her life would never be the same again.

Her mother noticed the fear in Lila and ushered a warmth of comfort, "This was a long time ago my love."

She reached across the table, placing a gentle hand on Lila’s, and added with a reassuring smile, “And now, you carry the light of our ancestors within you—a light that no shadow can ever extinguish.” Lila's frightened gaze turned hopeful. With a deep breath, she squeezed her mother’s hand and whispered, “Then I’ll make sure their light never fades—no matter what.”

A proud smile crossed her mother's face. “I know you will, my dear,” her mother said, her voice filled with quiet pride, “and remember, you are never alone—the sprites, the Guardian, and I will always be with you, guiding you every step of the way.”

Lila was tired. After clearing the table and helping her mother with the dishes, she retreated to her room once more, the silver pendant still resting against her chest, and fell into a deep, dreamless sleep, her mind finally at peace. The next day was laughably mild. The sun shone brightly through her window, birds chirped cheerfully outside, and the usual hustle and bustle of the city seemed almost playful, as if the world itself were trying to reassure her. Responding to the world's invitation, she arose, dressed and met her parents in their kitchen, seeing her father for the first time since yesterday's events.

Her father, a man of few words but warm presence, glanced up from his newspaper and gave her a nod, his eyes lingering on the pendant around her neck for a moment before he returned to his reading without a word. Lila noticed the smallest smile form on the corner of his lips, barely noticeable and easily deniable, yet it was there, she was sure. She couldn’t help but smile back, feeling a silent understanding pass between them, as if he, too, knew the significance of the day that had just passed and the journey that lay ahead. Though, since wasting time and dwelling is not a trait of Lila's, without hesitation, she made her way to the library to begin her studies.

The library, a quiet sanctuary filled with towering shelves of books, seemed to hum with a new energy as Lila stepped inside, as if the ancient knowledge within its walls recognised her as one of its own. Oblivious, Lila slumped into her usual seat and dove into a deep focus. Hours passed as she pored over texts on ancient civilisations, mythology, and forgotten languages, her mind racing to connect the dots between the stories in the books and the visions she had seen in the garden.

She was supposed to be studying for her exams, but she was preoccupied by a mystery so total, so important and rich with meaning that her exams were second page news.

As she flipped through the pages of an old, dusty tome, her fingers brushed against an illustration of a tree—its branches twisted into the same intricate symbols she had seen on her pendant, and her heart skipped a beat. Below the illustration was a passage from the King James Bible, 'Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you... For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' Lila’s breath caught in her throat as she read the words, feeling as though they had been placed there just for her, a sign that she was on the right path and that the answers she sought were within reach. The following pages spoke of an ancient magic that had been rumoured to have been lost many millennia ago.

The text described a power tied to the natural world, a force that could heal, create, and even reshape reality—but only for those who understood its true purpose and wielded it with pure intent. It explained that this power was one of frequency and vibration, that same power that was rumoured to have been used by the Egyptians to build the pyramids. Lila’s mind raced as she read, her fingers tracing the words as if they might leap off the page and reveal their secrets, and she realised that the symbols on her pendant were not just decorative—they were a key to unlocking this ancient power. The text explained that through breath, water and food--the very symbols on the pendant--the channel of power that underlies reality may be reached.

Lila’s heart pounded as she closed the book, her thoughts swirling with possibilities, and she knew that her next step was to learn how to harness this power—not for herself, but to fulfil the destiny that had been placed upon her shoulders. Breath, water, food... things so often overlooked, but obviously the true trinity of life and all sustenance. With a newfound sense of purpose, Lila gathered her things and left the library, the pendant resting against her chest like a compass guiding her toward the next chapter of her journey. On her way home she found a man standing on the sidewalk, waiting for her, a similar man to the monk-like man she had met the previous day, but different.

He wore robes of deep crimson, his eyes sharp and piercing, and as he stepped forward, Lila felt a chill run down her spine, sensing that this man was no guardian of stories. Instinctively, she turned and ran home and did not see the man thereafter. Her heart raced as she burst through the door, her parents looking up in alarm, and she knew that the shadows her mother had spoken of were no longer just whispers from the past—they were here, and they were watching.

Without a word, her mother knew instantly, and within five minutes they along with their belongings were in their family car, and they left the city.

As the city skyline faded in the rear-view mirror, Lila clutched the pendant tightly, her mind swirling with questions, fears, and the unshakeable determination to protect the ancient wisdom she had only just begun to understand. They were headed to an airport not far from Seoul, but first they were headed to get a train from Yangpyeong-gun, so as to have a lighter load, and scatter their tracks for the shadows that now followed them. The train ride was tense and silent, each of them lost in their own thoughts, but Lila couldn’t shake the feeling that the crimson-robed man was still out there, searching for them—and for the secrets she now carried.

She stared out the window to the hills of her new life, wondering if they knew who she was. The rolling hills seemed to whisper back, their ancient, timeless presence a reminder that the world was far older and wiser than she had ever imagined, and that her journey was only just beginning.

Lila was swept away into a journey that was far beyond her, but somehow, miraculously not without her influence. As the train rattled onward, she closed her eyes, feeling the pendant’s weight against her chest, and silently vowed to honour the legacy of her ancestors, no matter how far the path ahead might take her.

The stars that night seemed to gleam back just for her. Lila gazed up at the vast, twinkling expanse, feeling a strange sense of connection to the cosmos, as if the stars themselves were guiding her toward her destiny. When they reached the airport, they had only a backpack each left, and had left everything else behind at a gas station to a kind fellow who happily agreed to take their load for his own profit. As they boarded the plane, Lila glanced back one last time at the life they were leaving behind, her heart heavy but resolute, knowing that the journey ahead would test her in ways she couldn’t yet imagine. She took her seat near a wing of the plane, and looked out to the asphalt dashed with yellow paint below.

The engines roared to life, and as the plane lifted into the sky, Lila felt a strange sense of calm, as if the ancient sprites were whispering to her once more, assuring her that she was exactly where she needed to be. It was as though her physical altitude lifted her spirit up from the darkness that lingered after her newfound power, and into the night sky that had beckoned to her earlier that evening. With each passing mile, the weight of the unknown future felt lighter, and Lila closed her eyes, letting the hum of the plane lull her into a peaceful sleep, dreams of ancient worlds and shimmering sprites filling her mind.

And while her parents were deeply honoured to be the bearer of the chosen child, even they could not hold back concern from washing their faces during their daughter's rests. Her father reached over, gently brushing a strand of hair from Lila’s face, his expression a mix of pride and worry, while her mother clasped her hands tightly, silently praying for the strength to guide their daughter through the trials ahead. Her mother noticed that others were staring at her strange tension, and their small smirks, probably thinking their family had a phobia of heights. She forced a polite smile, masking her unease, and leaned back in her seat, her mind racing with thoughts of how to protect Lila from the shadows that now seemed to follow them even into the skies. With a sigh, closed eyes and a blanket, she too fell into a deep sleep.

The plane soared through the night, carrying its passengers toward an uncertain future, while the stars above watched over them, their ancient light a silent promise that Lila’s journey was guided by forces far greater than she could yet understand. They were headed to Montevideo Uruguay, a city almost literally antipodal to Seoul, their home city. As the plane descended toward Montevideo, Lila awoke to the first light of dawn breaking over the horizon, the golden rays illuminating a new chapter of her life—one that would unfold in a land far from everything she had ever known.

Her parents had arranged a guide who spoke both Spanish and Korean, an old friend of theirs, privy to the news, who had agreed to lend as much help as he could. The guide, a man with kind eyes and a warm smile, greeted them at the airport, his presence a comforting reminder that even in this distant land, they were not alone. He drove them through the city toward his home base where he and his crew managed operations, choosing amidst the pressure to chose to show Lila and her parents landmarks along the way, along with some of the city's history. As they passed the grand old library, he pointed out its historical significance, explaining how it had been a beacon of knowledge and refuge during times of turmoil.

He explained that throughout the 19th century there had been a lot of conflict in the country, and that his great-grandfather fought in the civil war. Lila listened intently, her eyes wide with fascination, as the man recounted stories of bravery and sacrifice, weaving together the history of the city with the legacy of his family. He explained how those battles had shaped the city into what it was today, and how every corner held a piece of their shared past. The city whizzed past them. They reached his base of operations after about an hour of driving, it wasn't much on the outside, but inside it was spectacular. The interior was filled with state-of-the-art technology, sleek furniture, and walls adorned with maps and blueprints of their various projects. In fact, there was technology in there that Lila had never seen in her life, nor could she have imagined existing. She marvelled at the holographic screens projecting three-dimensional maps and data, wondering what secrets these devices held and how they played a role in the city's hidden operations.

"People often think that silicon is the ultimate technology", said Isaac. "But in reality, we've only scratched the surface of what's possible," he continued, leading them further into the depths of his impressive base. The interior was loaded with superconductors, accelerators, and other feats of engineering that finding a name for was laughable. Lila could hardly believe her eyes as she gazed at the advanced technology, feeling a mix of awe and curiosity about the incredible possibilities that lay before her. Isaac continued, "Our ancestors were very smart people, smarter than us even, with our fighter jets, nuclear bombs, Mercedes Benz’s. They achieved feats that we can barely comprehend today, using natural elements and intuition in ways we've only begun to rediscover. People think that ancestors are only referred to in aboriginal culture, you know, that they only exist in the minds of the koombaya folk.

"But in truth, our ancestors' wisdom is woven into the very fabric of our existence, guiding us through the challenges we face today. They're why we're here, and sure we've done some cool stuff, but we need to be humble, because we are discovering now that they were far more advanced than ourselves.” Lila's parents exchanged a knowing glance, each understanding the depth of Isaac's words and the significance they carried for their family and the city. Lila could feel the hairs on her neck and arms rise. Isaac noticed her reaction and gave her a reassuring smile, "Don't worry, you're safe here," he said, his voice calm and steady. "An old friend of mine said to me once, 'the opposite to anxiety is excitement, it's just how you choose to look at the situation', because everything that scares us is an opportunity for something truly amazing, everyone knows this." Lila nodded thoughtfully, feeling the weight of Isaac's words and beginning to understand the importance of perspective in facing the unknown.

Lila allowed the hairs to rise again, not in fear, but in shear physiological inspiration and awe at the realisation of the journey that was unfolding before her. Isaac's crew, noticing the awe in Lila's expression, exchanged approving glances, silently acknowledging the significance of the moment for her. Isaac stepped towards her, adjusted his posture and said, "Lila, I know this is a lot to take in, but you are who we have been waiting for." The room fell silent, and Lila felt the weight of his words sink in, as if the very air around them had thickened with the gravity of the moment. Through Lila's puzzled face, she muttered, "But, why me?"

Isaac's eyes softened, and he replied, "Because you possess a unique gift, one that can unlock the secrets of our city's past and guide us toward a better future." Isaac took his time with Lila, his nature was kind, charming and inexplicably graceful. As they walked through the high-tech corridors, Isaac's voice was soothing, explaining the significance of each piece of equipment and how it all fit into the larger mission. Each piece was more refined than that which she had seen in images of tech billionaire warehouses, 'impossible', she thought.

Isaac continued his tour, showing them the control room where his crew monitored the city's activities, coordinating their efforts to maintain peace and order. "Why a control room?" Lila asked curiously. Isaac glanced at her and replied, "The control room allows us to monitor and manage the city's energy grid, communications, and security systems, ensuring everything runs smoothly and efficiently." Lila's face was somewhat stark, "what's there to control?" Isaac paused before replying, "In a city like ours, there's always something to manage—energy distribution, security threats, even the flow of information."

Lila's mother stepped in, "Honey you have to understand, I know the word 'control' sets you off, but there are people out there that have a lot more than a control room; everyone needs to manage in some way." Isaac nodded in agreement, adding, "It's not about control for the sake of power—it's about ensuring everything functions harmoniously for the greater good." Lila tried to understand, but she also knew that words have meaning, and that even the smallest seeds of darkness can take root when managers overlook it temporarily.

Her mother's gaze softened, and she said gently, "That's why it's crucial to remain vigilant and to always strive for balance, so that darkness never has a chance to take root." Lila's gaze followed suit, "Okay mother, I just get scared I guess." Her mother smiled gently, "It's okay to be scared, Lila. Fear can be a guide, showing us what truly matters and pushing us to be stronger." Isaac showed them to what were to be their dorms for the rest of their stay there. The rooms were surprisingly cosy, with soft lighting, comfortable beds, and personal touches that made them feel more like home.

There was a map of Montevideo, a lava lamp, and some paintings on the wall. Lila couldn't help but feel a sense of calm wash over her as she took in the details, realising that this place might just become a sanctuary for her family. It had that renegade feel with an aura of rebellion, every human with a face of kindness and a genuine care for the greater good beyond them. Lila's father, recognising the weight of the moment, placed a reassuring hand on her shoulder and whispered, "This is a new beginning for us all." He smiled, "You should get some rest, it's been a long couple days." Lila nodded, feeling the weight of exhaustion settle in, and made her way to her cosy dorm room, where she quickly drifted into a deep, restful sleep.

The next morning Lila found herself awake surprisingly early, before anyone else. She quietly got dressed and decided to explore the compound, curiosity driving her as she wandered through the hallways and discovered more of the hidden wonders Isaac's base had to offer. She found a coffee machine and figured no one would mind if she had one, given the sheer amount of money ruminating off of the very walls of the place.

As the aroma of freshly brewed coffee filled the air, Lila felt a sense of normalcy and comfort amidst the overwhelming technology and revelations of the previous day. Lila had never been in such a beautiful interior before, this was that of tech billionaire on steroids. Every surface seemed to gleam with innovation, as if each piece of technology was designed to be both functional and aesthetically stunning. The air hummed with energy, a testament to the groundbreaking advancements housed within those walls. As Lila took in her surroundings, she couldn't help but feel a sense of awe and inspiration, knowing that she was standing at the forefront of human achievement. The walls and floors were lined with a deep and rich concrete, smoothly cut and polished, making a sleek, modern design. It was a stark contrast to the outside world, almost as if they had entered a futuristic sanctuary.

Lila sat by a window that overlooked the beautiful rain-forest that the base seemed to be nested in so deeply, no wonder it looked so inconspicuous. As she marvelled at the dense foliage, she noticed a subtle shimmer in the air, like a mirage, hinting at the advanced technology concealed within the lush landscape. As Lila looked closer, it seemed that there was technology behind the glass in the forest as well, some sort of probes so harmonious with its surroundings it looked like some sort of bio-tech. Her curiosity piqued, Lila wondered if these bio-tech probes were responsible for maintaining the delicate balance between the base and the surrounding rain-forest.