

PROLOGUE



Kate had finally agreed to pose under the willow tree. Mother came and stood behind Mary at her easel. She placed her hand on Mary's shoulder. "It's beautiful!"

"Let me see." Kate started to get up.

"No!" Mary and Mother shouted at the same time. They looked at each other and laughed.

Kate sat down again reluctantly. "I want to see."

"Be patient," Mother said.

"How much longer?"

"Soon," Mary said.

"I've been sitting here for hours." Kate shifted in the wooden chair. The late afternoon sun illuminated her face. A slight breeze shook the leaves of the tree.

Mother touched the back of Mary's head. "Kate looks like a saint. There's a halo around her."

"I tried to capture the light that surrounds her."

Mother bent to examine the painting. "The light seems to be coming from inside of her too."

“It *is* coming from inside of her. It’s her inner light. Can you see it, Mama?” Mary stopped painting for a moment and looked at Kate.

“What light? Are you all done now?” Kate asked.

“Almost. I just need to touch up the lips. I’ll finish the background later.”

“Her hair looks blacker than it really is,” Mother said.

“The black is dark now because it’s wet. It’ll be just right once the paint dries.”

Mary continued painting in silence. Mother walked to the back fence and touched the bud of a white climbing rose. “Mary, these roses you planted are going to be so beautiful when they bloom.”

They all heard the phone ring inside the house.

“That’s probably for me.” Kate made a move to stand up.

“Papa will get that,” Mother said quickly. “Let your sister finish.”

“Five more minutes, Kate, that’s all. Do you know how long I’ve been wanting to do this?”

Mother stood next to Mary again. “If you only knew what I had to promise to get her to sit for you.”

Kate said, “Shhh, Mama, that’s our secret, remember?”

“What did you promise her?” Mary looked up at Mother.

“Should I tell?” Mother asked Kate.

“No.”

“Yes,” Mary countered.

“Keep on painting, Mary. I don’t think you’re going to be able to keep your sister in that chair for too much longer.”

“Okay, but tell me what you promised her.”