

D A R & EARTH

# REVELATIONS



ATHENA M. KAIMAN

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# 1

## WAITING

TUESDAY, OCTOBER 9, 2018 4:00 PM

“I’M HOME! THAGAR?”  
“Aelish?”

She heard his footfall coming toward the front entryway. She wriggled out of her flypack and placed it on the hall table.

“Ah!” Thagar picked her up and began twirling her around, covering her face and neck with kisses. “I’m glad you’re back safely. When you’re gone, the house loses your beautiful lilac scent.” He set her down and held her face between his hands, deeply kissing her.

“That’s the best part of coming home,” said Aelish, stroking his face. “After meeting with Isabela, I decided to take an extra day to continue logging my observations of the environmental degradations; there were so many, Thagar.” She hugged him tightly, feeling his strength surround her.

“Come,” said Thagar. “Let us sit in our favorite spot in the observatory and you can catch me up. Shall we have a spirit?”

“Yes, definitely,” replied Aelish.

As they settled into the tufted sofa, their spirits on the table in front of them, Aelish snuggled closer to Thagar and breathed in his essence. He stroked her head as they sat in peaceful silence. The sun was beginning to set in the autumn sky and Aelish felt herself getting sleepy. Embraced by his warmth, she was unable to prevent the oncoming, blissful oblivion and fell asleep.

She woke up about an hour later in the same position. Thagar had not moved, allowing her slumber to remain undisturbed.

“I’m sorry I left you,” she said. “I always forget how exhausted I am after returning from Earth—my Earth-lag.”

Thagar chuckled and asked, “So . . . how was Isabela? Did she accept your offer?”

“Not yet,” said Aelish. “I told her to take some time and think about it. She is amazing, Thagar. So smart and mature, well beyond her years. But her mother is dreadfully ill. It was nearly unbearable to see up close. Before leaving, I put a variety of No Pain spells on her. They should last for two months whilst she undergoes the initial phase of her experimental treatments. But I fear she will not survive.”

“A tragedy,” sighed Thagar.

“How Isabela and her family cope in the face of such sadness, is a testament to the strength of their love for each other, but most especially for Marisol—that is Isabela’s mother’s name,” said Aelish. “They all made selfless sacrifices to give her one last chance at life. It was a humbling experience, as I gained an understanding of the devotion they have for her.”

“It sounds like you and Melanthia chose the right Human child, Aelish,” encouraged Thagar. “She sounds extraordinary, like another being I know.” He gently kissed the top of her head.

“She must have nearly fainted when she saw your lavender face. What did she say?”

“She thought she was either dead or having a nightmare,” laughed Aelish.

Thagar chuckled and nodded. “Sounds about right.”

“She’s sassy, sarcastic, and has a biting wit, Thagar,” said Aelish. “But a lot of that is pretense. She’s built quite a wall around herself. I can only hope I successfully penetrated that wall deep enough, for her to agree to work with us. All I can do now is wait.”

Thagar listened intently, like he always did when she returned from a mission to Earth. Suddenly, there was a loud knock on the front door.

“Ah!” said Thagar, standing to answer the door. “I ordered us a scrumptious meal from Tereana to celebrate your return. I will set it up for us whilst you rest.”

“I love you, Thagar,” she called after him. Aelish closed her eyes and thanked God. She loved Thagar beyond description. Seeing his beautiful bronzed face and kissing his beautiful mouth, was always the best part about returning to DAR.

After their meal, when her stories of Earth and Isabela were finished, Thagar looked at her and gently suggested, “Let’s go to our bedchamber. I need to love you—it restores my soul.”

They walked arm in arm to their bedchamber. As he climbed into the bed, he said, “I love you, Lady Aelish, to the Earth and back.” And he proceeded to show her just how much.



A month after her visit with Isabela, Aelish rose before the sun. She sat at the kitchen table working on her report about the Earth’s deteriorating environment for the Head Council.

She had hoped to include Isabela's decision prior to finishing it, but she was out of time—her presentation was in three days.

As she reviewed her observations in writing, somehow the horrific conditions seemed even more alarming. She knew that in the time it had taken to finish her cup of tea, huge swaths of ice were actively calving off the glaciers in Antarctica. A single tear rolled down her cheek.

"Is there anythin' else I can get ya', Aelish?" asked Drummond. He was nearly finished with his chores and was heading to bed.

"Oh, thank you, Drummond. I'm fine," said Aelish, quickly wiping away the tear. "You go rest."

"Ah!" cried out Aelish and Drummond, simultaneously.

A Sylph with pink wings and green hair appeared across the table from Aelish.

"Maybe she has the answer ya' been waitin' for," said Drummond.

The Sylph extended her arm and handed Aelish a small rolled piece of parchment.

"Is this from Earth?" asked Aelish. The Sylph batted her eyes three times.

"Open it! Open it!" yelled Drummond.

Aelish unfurled the note and read what Isabela had told the Sylph, "Please tell Aelish that my answer is yes—I want her to be my Oraculi."

Aelish jumped out of her chair saying, "She said yes, Drummond! She said yes!"

The Sylph smiled at her and flew off. Aelish handed the note for Drummond to read.

"Well done, Aelish! I know it feels like ya' been waitin' a lifetime, but that was actually pretty fast!"

"I suppose it was," agreed Aelish. "This is brilliant. Now I can include this in my report and begin planning the next steps for Isabela. Just brilliant!"



“Well, I know I shall have a good sleep now, Aelish,” Drummond said smiling. “I’m chuffed for ya.”

“You’re such a dear, worrying for me. It was so nice to have you here to share the news with right when I found out. I’m going to wake Thagar to tell him. Off to bed, then, Drummond,” said Aelish, shooing him away with her hands.

“All right, Aelish. Of course, let me know if ya’ need anythin’ during the day,” said Drummond, as he skipped out of the kitchen to his dwelling beneath the house.

Aelish headed down the hallway to their bedchamber and nearly collided with Thagar, who was fully dressed for work.

“What is all this ruckus before the sun has risen?” he teased.

Aelish jumped into his arms with the note in her hand exclaiming, “Isabela said yes, Thagar! She said yes!”

“Let me see . . . was this just delivered?” he asked.

“Minutes ago. I simply can’t believe it,” said Aelish, taking a deep breath.

“Congratulations, my love, I expected nothing less,” said Thagar, kissing the top of her head. “It must feel like a tremendous responsibility now that it has become a reality.”

“Well, you know where I will be all day— here— working to finish my report now that I can include Isabela’s decision. And then I need to begin working on the next steps for Isabela.”

“Let’s go out and celebrate tonight, yes?” asked Thagar.

“Absolutely. But then I will need to work more afterward,” said Aelish.

“Of course, my love. I fear I have lost you to a twelve-year-old Earthling.” He took her face in his hands and gently stroked her cheeks. “I’m so very proud of my mate.”

“Thank you, my love,” said Aelish. She hugged him once more before he left.

Later that night, Aelish quietly crawled into bed and reflected on her accomplishment. She couldn't believe the plan had actually worked. Finally, right before the sun rose, she fell into a deep and satisfying sleep.

# 2

## GIFTED & TALENTED

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2018 10:00 AM

“ALL RIGHT, CLASS. You will have forty-five minutes to complete the test. Read each question carefully and don’t forget to show your work,” instructed Dr. Rios.

Isabela began reading the questions and finished the test in fifteen minutes. This was the second test in her advanced science class. So far, she had not found the class material stimulating and was very disappointed. She began chewing on her pencil in boredom, when she caught Dr. Rios making a face at her that conveyed: *you’re done already?*

She nodded with a weak smile and noted his look of consternation. She knew her answers were correct and did not understand why he seemed upset with her.

After class, Dr. Rios caught her by the door. “Can I see you after school today, Isabela?”

“Um . . . sure,” she said tentatively. “Did I do something wrong?”

“No, no . . . I just want to discuss how things are going with you in my class and in all your other classes. You’ve been in school for over a month already,” he said, smiling.

“Okay. I’ll see you later, then. I better go before I’m late for math,” said Isabela.

After suffering utter boredom through the next forty-five minutes of her math class, Isabela headed to the cafeteria. She was buying her lunch today and hoped there was something a bit more exciting than last week's choices. She spotted her three new friends at their regular table.

"Hey, Izzy," said Eve. "How's it going?"

Isabela eyed the burger on Eve's plate and was suddenly starving. "I'm okay. I like your top, Eve," said Isabela, taking off her backpack and tossing it onto the floor. She quickly pulled out her phone and checked for messages, always worried about her mother.

"Thanks," said Eve, smiling. "I went to the mall with my Mom over the weekend, so you should be seeing some new, stellar selections this week."

"Always clothes-obsessed," remarked Charlotte, scanning Instagram on her phone. Isabela watched Charlotte scrolling through her favorite pugs and still couldn't believe kids were allowed to keep their phones with them during the day. At her old school, they were strictly prohibited. If you got caught using it, the phone was confiscated for at least a day, if not longer.

"Yeah, but that color pink does look awesome with her blue eyes," commented Tyler. "It also looks great with those jeans."

Eve, Charlotte, and Isabela started laughing. Tyler had recently come out and the girls had noticed that he was growing more confident each day. His parents even held a coming-out party for him that Isabela had attended. The Latinx community in L.A. was prevalent, but not in middle school. Despite Brookdale Middle School being located in a city within the Bible Belt, it was surprisingly progressive, as it had a gay-straight alliance. Yet back home in the progressive city of L.A., her old school did *not* have a GSA. It was very strange.

“I’ll be right back,” said Isabela. “Heading to the chow line.”

“The chocolate chip cookie tastes like dried glue,” called out Eve. “Skip it.”

Isabela gave Eve the thumbs up over her shoulder and joined the shorter of the two lines. As she meandered closer to the trays, she took a minute to look at all the kids in the cafeteria.

*Everything you need to know about people can be understood by observing a middle school cafeteria.*

She watched a clique of popular girls flirting with a group of boys at the table next to them. Then there was poor Kevin; he was an odd duck, sitting alone, isolated from the other kids.

*He could totally end up the school shooter.*

There was another group of girls dressed from head to toe in designer labels, just in case anyone forgot how wealthy they were. And then there were the posers, those desperately trying to emulate the wealth and status of the designer-label kids.

*I’m not even from here and I can see right through them.*

But to Isabela, the most pervasive status in this school was simply being white. And she personally felt the lack of *that* status, profoundly. There were a large percentage of students of Korean descent, but the white kids reigned. Isabela was one of maybe five Latinos and she had yet to meet one African American kid. She thought about this for a moment and mentally reviewed all of her classes.

*Oh yeah—Keisha, in my health class.*

It had taken a couple of weeks to befriend Eve, Charlotte, and Tyler. It was difficult breaking through relationships that had begun for these kids in kindergarten. But she also knew from her own experience in L.A., by middle school a lot of kids wanted to break free from their elementary school reputations created by athletic prowess, intelligence, beauty, or bullying. Middle school was the turning point toward the big league—high

school. From the pimply faces to the budding breasts, it was a plethora of adolescent qualities for her to mix and combine in her imagination, morphing the ugly girl in middle school into the homecoming queen in high school.

"I'll have the burger lunch today with a skim milk, please," said Isabela, looking down at the selection of foods in front of her.

"Would you also like the chocolate chip cookie?" asked the lunch lady.

Isabela's head shot up when she heard the Spanish accent. The lunch lady smiled at her; two brown faces, in a sea of whiteness, stared at each other in a brief moment of fellowship. Despite Eve's warning on the cookie's abysmal taste, Isabela said, "Yes, please."

*How can I say no?*

As the lunch lady passed the tray to her with the cookie on it, Isabela whispered, "Gracias."

"De nada," said the lunch lady, smiling, before moving on to the kids behind Isabela.

Isabela plunked her tray down onto the table, as Eve admonished, "I told you not to get the cookie! It's disgusting."

"I know. But before I could say no, the lunch lady had already put it on my tray," Isabela lied.

"You'd think they could get better food at this school," stated Charlotte, with her face still in her phone.

"I like the sweet potato fries," stated Tyler, grabbing one off of Isabela's tray.

"Tyler!" Isabela yelled.

"So . . . what did Dr. Rios say to you at the end of class?" asked Tyler, reaching across the table to grab another fry.

Tyler was very observant and never missed a chance to gossip. "He wants me to stop by after school to discuss how my classes are going," said Isabela. There was no point in her trying to lie; Tyler always found out everything.

“Hmm . . . did he say anything else?” pressed Tyler.

“No, that was it,” said Isabela, greatly enjoying her burger. She dipped it in a mixture of mayo and ketchup, took a bite, and stared at Tyler.

“Dr. Rios really cares about his students, Miss Izzy,” said Tyler. “He thinks outside the box. Sounds too simple that he just wants to talk about your classes.”

“Izzy will tell us all tomorrow, Tyler,” sighed Eve. “So can you wait that long? I swear I’ve never met such a busybody.”

“Eve’s right, Tyler. Enough! Let Izzy eat her lunch in peace,” stated Charlotte.

“Fine,” said Tyler, “but I want a full report tomorrow.”

“Of course,” said Isabela, putting three fries into her mouth at once. She reached down and picked up four additional fries and gestured for Tyler to open his mouth. She dipped them in her ketchup-mayo mixture, which she knew Tyler detested.

“Oh, come on, Izzy!” yelled Tyler. “You know I hate that on them.”

“I *do* know that,” Isabela said laughing. She slid the tray over so he could eat her remaining fries. While he was there, he also helped himself to half her cookie.

“This cookie isn’t so bad, Eve,” said Tyler, handing the other half to Isabela.

“Oh please!” exclaimed Eve. “I wouldn’t feed that to my dog.”

Isabela eyed the clock and quickly finished her lunch. The bell rang and they all gathered up their things. They dumped whatever was left on their trays into the segregated garbage bins. They piled their now empty trays onto the dirty-tray holders and headed out of the cafeteria to their next class.

++++

As her last class wound down, Isabela became a bit anxious about her meeting with Dr. Rios. The dismissal bell rang, and Isabela headed in the opposite direction from all the other kids charging out of the building. She stood in front of the closed door of his classroom. He was sitting at the teacher's desk, on his phone texting. She gently knocked. He looked up, put his phone away, and motioned for her to come in.

"Hi, Isabela," Dr. Rios said smiling. "How was the rest of your day?"

"Okay," said Isabela, standing and nervous.

Dr. Rios got up from his desk. "Let's sit over here by the window."

Isabela followed him. He pulled out two desks from their rows, so they could face one another. The window was open and Isabela could hear the birds chirping in the trees outside.

Dr. Rios sat down and put a file on his student desk. She sat across from him and looked at his face. She remembered what Aelish had told her about people seeming much older than they really were, and that Dr. Rios was thirty years old. For some reason, it made her relax.

"So tell me, how is your mother doing?" asked Dr. Rios.

"Thank you for asking," replied Isabela. "She is holding her own and is tolerating the treatments. Her appetite is slightly improved, but she is extremely weak and needs to be in a wheelchair when she is not in the hospital bed."

"Okay . . . all right. That's good she's not in the bed twenty-fours hours a day, Isabela. I'm sure you won't know for some time whether the treatments are effectively combatting her cancer."

"Yes," agreed Isabela. "It will be months from now. But I'm keeping a log of how she feels each day, including her appetite and energy level. At this point, it appears that she is coping and not declining further from the treatments, you know?"



“I understand,” nodded Dr. Rios. “And how are you doing, Isabela? Are you making friends? Does it still feel strange being here, compared to L.A.?”

“I’ve made three friends,” said Isabela. “You know Tyler from science class, and I’ve also made friends with Eve and Charlotte. I’m sorry; I don’t remember their last names. And yes, it still feels really strange being here.”

“Oh, I know those two girls. They are both very nice kids,” said Dr. Rios. “It will take some time to get used to being here. Compared to L.A., it is so different. I had a similar experience when I left Arizona to go to college at Georgetown University. Whew! It was not only on the East Coast, but it was also in one of the most expensive neighborhoods of Washington D.C. Talk about culture shock! Sometimes I think I stayed on to complete my Ph.D. at Georgetown because it took me years to acclimate, and I didn’t want to go through it all over again.”

Isabela chuckled. “It’s just so “white” here in Brookdale.”

“Ha, ha . . . it is, indeed,” laughed Dr. Rios. “Blanco city!”

Isabela started laughing. It felt so good to be able to share that with someone other than her family.

“But I can tell you this, the South has a much easier rhythm than D.C.,” said Dr. Rios, rolling his eyes.

“Really?” asked Isabela.

“Definitely,” said Dr. Rios. “The beltway, as it’s known, is a one-of-a-kind place in the U.S., a very stressful environment.” He opened the file on the desk and began looking through the papers. “Okay, so I have your records here from both your elementary and middle schools in L.A. I also have your GATE records.”

“My *gate* records . . . what are those?” asked Isabela.

“I’m sorry. GATE stands for the Gifted and Talented Education curriculum for the state of California.

“Ohh, right,” said Isabela.

“Your scores are very high, Isabela,” said Dr. Rios, examining the file. “Your test results from kindergarten through the sixth grade are in the ninety-ninth percentile. Some of the sixth- grade math and English questions are at the tenth-grade level. But despite you being placed in the gifted and talented program, I think they missed something.”

“What do you mean, ‘they missed something’?” asked Isabela.

“On the two tests I’ve given you in my advanced science class, you’ve scored one hundred percent. But both times, you finished in fifteen minutes when the test should have taken forty-five minutes. I have a suspicion that you were not challenged by the GATE curriculum in L.A., and I am concerned that you are not being challenged by our advanced curriculum here, either. Are my suspicions correct?” he asked.

Isabela sighed. “The school I attended in L.A. was pretty much evenly split between white and Latino kids. I remember the teachers talking about how great it was that so many more Latino kids were in the gifted program now than in the past. But it was like once they reached an acceptable amount of Latino kids enrolled in the program, they never came back and spoke with us—like you are doing now,” explained Isabela.

“So they tested and enrolled you, but then never paid close attention to your development as a gifted student, yes?” asked Dr. Rios.

“Exactly,” agreed Isabela. “Once you were in the program that was pretty much it.”

“So they neglected to determine if you were, in fact, truly being challenged. Was this the situation for both white and Latino students?” asked Dr. Rios.

“No,” said Isabela. “The white kids who were excelling, often left the public schools and went into private schools, specifically

tailored for gifted and talented kids. I knew that my parents couldn't afford that, but even if they could have, the teachers and principals seemed satisfied that the Latino kids had come as far as they had. They didn't pressure our parents toward the private schools."

"Hmm . . . like they felt . . . it was good enough?" asked Dr. Rios.

"Yeah, that's a good way of putting it," said Isabela.

"Are you aware of the disparity in test results between white students and students who are Latino or African American?" he asked.

"Yes," said Isabela.

"Black and brown children traditionally test much lower than white children. Placing an increasing number of these students into gifted and talented programs is seen as a great achievement by the school districts where this occurs. So, at your middle school in L.A., I understand why there was no further testing or additional attention given to your Latino classmates, once they were placed in the GATE program. This is all a very controversial topic. But as your teacher, I am only concerned with one student right now, and that student is you, Isabela. Are you being challenged?" asked Dr. Rios.

"When my mother got sick," began Isabela, "I was ten years old and in the fifth grade; my grades began slipping. I wasn't doing any of my homework and I stopped studying. My family was so focused on my mother's terrible diagnosis that my grades and my brother's grades were no longer important. Before she got sick, my mother was the education police; she hounded us constantly about our homework, kept a schedule of our tests—there was no way we could get away with anything when it came to school," said Isabela. "She was tough."

"And then?" asked Dr. Rios.

“After the initial shock of her diagnosis was over, I began researching her illness. I went to the library; I read everything I could on the Internet; I even went to the local community college and bought books to try and help me understand what was going to happen to her. It was awful. But that was when I knew I wasn’t being challenged in school. I was able to understand college textbooks on molecular biology, physics, and chemistry. I’ve accumulated quite a collection.”

“And how old were you?” asked Dr. Rios.

“I was just about to turn eleven,” replied Isabela.

“So, in *this* advanced-level science class, you understand everything and are not learning anything new, then, correct?” asked Dr. Rios.

“No disrespect, Dr. Rios, but if I’m being completely honest, I think I could teach your class,” said Isabela.

Dr. Rios burst out laughing. “So how am I doing as a teacher, Isabela?”

“Good! The kids are really getting it. How are their test scores?” asked Isabela.

“Most are testing at eighty-five to ninety-five percent,” answered Dr. Rios. He began laughing again. “I suddenly feel like I’m speaking with a fellow teacher rather than with one of my students, Isabela.”

“Do you need any help with the lesson plans because I had some really cool ideas about what we could be doing during our labs,” Isabela said smiling.

“Oh, my goodness, Isabela, you are so funny!” laughed Dr. Rios. “I think I’m going to pass on that offer, although I greatly appreciate it, and I think we should focus solely on you.”

“Okay . . . what does that mean?” asked Isabela.

“I am going to speak to the principal about your educational deficiency and, if possible, I would like to come to your house

tonight to speak to your parents about having you properly tested. I think I hit the nail on the head when I said earlier that your teachers and schools in L.A. had missed something. *Comprendes, Isabela?*” asked Dr. Rios.

“Sí, entiendo, Dr. Rios. I understand,” said Isabela. “Where would I be tested? Here at school or in a private testing center?”

“Are you worried about the cost to your family, Isabela?” asked Dr. Rios.

“Our family has always been middle class, Dr. Rios,” answered Isabela. “My father does very well as an executive in his company. Despite relocating to Tennessee, he’s still being paid an L.A. salary. And because everything is less expensive here, than in L.A., it has pushed us into an upper-middle-class lifestyle. Even before my mother got sick, she no longer *needed* to work. She continued working because she enjoyed it and because Abuela took such good care of my brother and me.

“But since she’s been sick, I’ve overheard many conversations my father has had on the phone with the insurance companies. Over the last two years, there have been too many denials of coverage for her cancer treatments. The result was large out-of-pocket payments. And now with the experimental treatments, there have been even *more* expenses not covered. That is why my brother Javi works as a barista, when he should be pitching his 98-mph fastball at UCLA. So, I do feel a responsibility to not add to my dad’s financial headaches for something like testing.”

Dr. Rios smiled at Isabela. “I understand,” he said. “Let me see what I can come up with this afternoon regarding the details of how we can get you tested, okay?”

“Okay,” agreed Isabela. “But if you want to come to my house tonight, I better text Abuela to tell her. The house is always company-ready, but she will kill me if I don’t give her a few hours lead time. What time were you thinking?”

“How about after dinner . . . say seven o’clock?” asked Dr. Rios.

“Okay. Can I text her right now?” asked Isabela.

“Of course, go ahead,” said Dr. Rios.

Isabela began pecking at her phone with the alacrity of a young person and within five minutes everything was arranged: Dr. Rios would be expected at the Torres house at seven o’clock this evening.

“Thank you for speaking with me today, Dr. Rios. I really appreciate it,” Isabela said humbly.

“Don’t forget to show me your collection of books when I come over. I want to see what you’ve been reading,” said Dr. Rios.

“Okay, awesome. I will see you tonight,” said Isabela. She got up from the desk, put her phone away, and walked toward the classroom door.

“Isabela?” he called out to her.

She quickly turned around. “Yes?”

“Please tell your Abuela not to fuss,” he said smiling.

“Yeah, right,” chuckled Isabela. “See you later.”

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