Isis Rising Excerpt

Chapter Nineteen

Though it was a long walk from Alec’s apartment back to her rented cottage, Desiree needed time alone to digest what Michael had said. She remembered how her mother used to run to clear her head. For Desiree it had always been walking. She had loved Georgetown’s sprawling campus. Those walks had saved her sanity. Now it was Dublin’s turn.

Could any of this even be possible? Alec’s ghostbusting was amazing but understandable. Sanantha’s stories had primed her to accept Joseph. Her healing ability still scared her. She didn’t know what to make of the Pearl. Now the Archangel Michael? On a quest to capture the Devil himself? Seriously? Her little college graduation getaway had turned into a religious rollercoaster, with each turn more shocking than the last.

She looked at the people around her, driving by, stepping into and out of shops, going about their business unaware, undisturbed by the forces she now knew were real. Most of them were probably Catholic. Many genuinely believed in God and heaven and angels. Not her angels; beneficent, ethereal angels. Incarnate angels belonged in biblical times. Warring angels belonged in myth, along with ancient gods. How calm would these people stay if they knew better?

Yet she was calm. Amazed, confused, dubious, but calm. Shouldn’t she be freaking out? Did getting kidnapped and experimented on by a madman somehow entitle her to talk to angels as an equal? What did it mean to carry within you the essence of a god? Was she supposed to live up to the hopes of all those Egyptians and Haitians who had prayed to her god? Her Art History Bachelor’s degree hardly prepared her to lead a faith. Yet not only Joseph, but now Michael too had confirmed her identity.

She paused and looked around to make sure she hadn’t wandered off course.

Was she insane to accept this as okay? Was Sanantha too close to the subject to make a proper diagnosis? Sanantha had battled this Devil face to face. Maybe it’s not insanity if you’re not making it up.

She stopped walking and stifled the urge to laugh out loud, pure, overwhelmed, nervous laughter.

Before she could make a public spectacle, an ambulance siren jolted her back. The short burst cleared the sidewalk as it turned into the hospital driveway across the street. She couldn’t tell what, but something about that ambulance seized her attention and would not let go. Waiting only for traffic to clear, she marched across, dropping all her doubts like loose change in the street.

The paramedics opened the back doors and pulled out a gurney laden with a woman heavy with child. The husband climbed down after as they rushed her inside. Curiosity melted into dread as Desiree focused on the woman’s bulging tummy. Something was wrong.

She dashed in right behind the husband and strode alongside with the confident step of someone with a clear destination. She glanced sideways at the pregnant woman, trying to discern why this ordinary episode should so completely demand her obsession.

The woman was panicked, but wasn’t in pain. No one asked her any questions. The paramedics handed her to the doctors who rushed her in without switching her to a hospital bed. No one said anything that explained what was happening. They must have radioed ahead.

Somehow the sounds inside the hospital were louder than she expected. She could hear every voice, even from people on the far side of the lobby.

Desiree followed them down a corridor and around a bend, doing her best to appear headed somewhere else. The further into the hospital she went, the stronger the smell of antiseptic became. The expectant mother smelled strongly of sweat and fear. She finally got a good impression from the baby. Something was missing. They turned and pushed through doors marked Surgery. She was left standing there blinking. What was missing? How did she know?

She was sweating, and not just from her nerves. She was still wearing her favorite green wool scarf. She unwrapped it from her neck and fanned herself with a hand in the cool, overclean air. She looked around and wondered what she had hoped to accomplish.

Her assessment didn’t last long. She made it back to the first intersection before another urge, just like the first one, steered her feet around a corner. She did not understand this compulsion, but she felt it coming from her heart, the same place she drew from when she healed. Perhaps another facet? She dared not miss the chance to learn more.

The door stood open to an ordinary ward room with the lights turned low. An old man sat at the bedside holding an old woman’s hand. She was still, with tubes and wires connected all around her. Desiree could see the man’s pain in how he hung his white haired head and the way he stroked her hand. In contrast, she appeared at peace, whether sleeping or under medication.

Peace was not what Desiree felt. She felt the woman was sad, sad and tired, tired of being in pain, tired of causing her husband pain, tired of a long life with no promise of ever getting any better. The feeling lowered itself onto Desiree like a crushing weight. Overcome, she began to cry. The old man heard her sob and turned to look, and she ducked out of the doorway.

She leaned back against the hallway wall and twisted her scarf up in her hands against her heart. The woman’s loss of hope shook Desiree like nothing in her life ever had touched her. The black empty despair was almost too much to endure, yet she didn’t want to turn away. She found herself sliding down the wall with her legs curled up.

That was when she noticed the scarf. In the onslaught she had wound the ends around each wrist with only a few inches left between. The pressure was painful. She flexed her hands, one then the other. Then she saw what she was doing. At the ends of a bridge, one opened while the other closed.

Realization snapped into place so hard she thought she had cracked her neck. Now she knew what the baby was missing. She also knew what to do for the old woman’s suffering. She looked at her hands and wondered how to turn the idea into reality.

She stopped herself abruptly. Even if she could pull this off, should she? What right did she have? This wasn’t just healing. This was also taking a life. It was also…ending suffering. Should she not try to replace suffering with joy?

She decided her left was the baby and her right was the woman. It was the last decision she needed to make.

As soon as she chose, a wave of relief swept away the sorrow. Her heart beat faster and the healing heat surged to fill her hands. No, not just her hands. She felt it all around her like she was connected to the world at some impossibly deep level. She slowly reached out and felt her grasp of the energy around her. She gently tugged at the threads. It was now easy to see her hands as these two people in need.

She realized she wasn’t entirely in control of what she was doing. The power came up as if it had been eagerly awaiting her permission. She pulled a handful of the energy into her right hand, gently closing her fingers around it. She kissed it. By now her heart was beating so hard it shook her whole body. She fought back a rising delirium. Taking a deep breath, she pulled the scarf taut before opening her right hand while closing her left.

As she opened her right, and released the old woman’s life, her mouth filled with the taste of the most putrid vomit, even though she had not wretched up anything. She wanted to spit it out but dared not break the bridge between her wrists. As she visualized the energy moving across to her left, she closed her fingers around it. The vile taste was flushed out by the smells of flowers and earth and wind and suddenly she felt like she had the whole world of life distilled in her breath. She closed her hand securely, capturing the energy firmly in the baby. Something boiled up within her, starting deep within her and rising like a flash flood. All at once it shook her hard and forced the air from her lungs. She sat on the floor gasping, staring at her two perfectly normal hands. She wiped her tears and her sweat, then unwound the scarf.

A low but shrill, steady tone cut through her reverie. She stood up and confirmed it was the old woman’s heart monitor alarm signaling death. The old man stood up, leaned over the body, and kissed her goodbye. Desiree still harbored misgivings about doing this.

What about the baby? Desiree ran around the corner and pushed open the surgical suite doors. The piercing healthy cry of a newborn told Desiree all she needed to hear. She let joy push away the doubts. As she turned to walk away, she heard elated voices welcoming the baby. Someone said, “It’s a miracle.” Maybe it was. Desiree had never thought of miracles as such tough choices.