

Excerpts from *This Dreamer* by Sara Watterson

Chapter 1 - The Watcher

What a strange feeling, being miraculously knit together, unwoven, and then made whole again.

Evie felt the fiber of her mortal body pull tight in completion as the sudden pressure of solid earth sent her arms wide. She stepped back, but not quickly enough. Her backside thudded to the ground.

Lovely.

Eyes still closed, she reached out and brushed tingling fingers over soft grass and breathed in the fresh-cut smell.

She opened her eyes, dark lashes fluttering in the brilliant light. She sucked in a breath at the heat on her skin. The sun. She'd never felt anything quite like it. Like a gentle caress from the heavens.

This was the moment she'd been waiting for. Today was to be *her* day—a day to celebrate her first time on the ground.

But that was before they snatched her dreams away.

She'd been so angry. So hurt. She'd acted impulsively.

What have I done?

Her breathing shallowed, and she put her head in her hands.

The option to turn back had long passed.

On a slow exhale, she forced her muscles to relax. She'd be back before anyone knew of her absence. Then she raised her head and lifted an arm to expose her palm to the wondrous heat.

Her once-pale hand, now a rich honey tone, glowed in the golden light. Joram had warned she'd look different on the ground, but seeing it was something altogether different.

Even if they hadn't wished it to be, today would be a day of firsts just as she'd planned.

Her first time on the ground.

Her first time in the sun.

Her first time in a mortal body.

A smattering of yellow flowers shivered in the soft breeze. Rustling trees enveloped the meadow, and beyond them, skyscrapers towered in a rectangle like unmoving guardians. A city park, then. A timid smile tugged at her lips.

I'm finally here.

Her boots scraped on a rigid surface where a circular metal disk stood out among the spongy blades. How could the humans not realize a portal peeked from the green here in plain sight? A foreign dot on the otherwise vibrant landscape.

The warm breeze picked up tendrils of her long dark hair, and she closed her eyes to feel it brush her cheeks, her arms—invisible air tickling her skin.

But even as she stood serene, her smile faded. What if they realized she was gone? What would they do? This trip was not authorized, and surely no other Watcher in all of eternity had ever disobeyed so blatantly. She opened her eyes again.

A strange sensation pounded at her ears.

It was coming from *her*. Placing a hand over her heart, Evie let her palm capture the quick rhythmic motion. From her studies, she knew it to be an indication of the blood thrumming through this body. Her smile returned. Oh, how she'd dreamed of this moment—standing on the ground in a mortal body. The beating slowed as she put her crimes out of her mind. She traced a finger down the blue veins at her wrist.

Behind her, Joram cleared his throat. “Are you about done inspecting yourself?” Laughter broke up his warm voice. “Your face looks like you can’t decide on an emotion... as usual, I suppose. You’ll pass brilliantly as a human.”

Evie turned to the travel coordinator, ready to defend her immortal solidity, but forgot his jab as she took in his altered appearance. He cocked his head, amused, a few paces away. Clearly, *he* hadn’t fallen flat upon arrival. His skin—normally a flat grayish hue—held a similar golden tone as hers. His hair, several shades darker than usual, shadowed eyes now a light blue. Despite these alterations, his features were much the same, and his build was as tall and familiar as always. He raised an eyebrow at her inspection.

Her cheeks warmed—another new sensation. Ignoring him, she rotated in a slow circle, arms spread wide.

“This is amazing. Exactly as I imagined.” And she had imagined it. Many times. “Do I look like myself in the same way you do?”

“Yes, but your skin and hair are darker, like mine. Your eyes, though”—he gestured toward her face—“they’re still gold.” From his pocket, he produced a pair of dark sunglasses. “You’ll need to wear these while we’re here. I didn’t have time to program you to Sector Five Blue.”

She slid them on, her idiotic grin back in place. “How do I look?”

“You look great. Now, let’s get going before someone sees you twirling about.” He strode down a well-manicured stone path toward a noisy street.

She smirked at his back and jogged to catch up.

“Joram, will they forgive me for this?” she asked, falling into step beside him.

“Probably not.”

When she whipped her head toward him, he shrugged. “Oh, I’m kidding. How should I know? It’s irrelevant because they’re not going to find out. Look, you’re here. You wanted this. You might as well enjoy it.”

He was right. She should enjoy herself. This sector provided so much to see and do. And she intended to catch a glimpse of one particular mortal—for her research, of course. That’s what she always told herself, even at her Control Room desk. This was her chance to see the Dreamer.

Thinking about this impending *research*, she grinned. Curiously, her mortal heart thudded a little faster.

Chapter 2 - The Dreamer

Adan sucked in a breath as consciousness plunged him back into reality.

The force of his body's awakening jarred his desk, and his heavy books crashed to the floor. His hand flew to his chest where his heart thundered, unharmed. His breathing came in great heaves as startled faces gawked at him.

Oh no. Not again.

The real fear melted as grins and sneers replaced the student's shocked expressions. Girls giggled, and some guys laughed outright. Others eyed his hand on his chest. He pulled it back under his desk.

Great. Mr. Haywood was making his way over. A flurry of movement erupted as students shuffled their cell phones out of sight. "Adan, were you sleeping in my class again?"

"Yes, sir," he mumbled. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"That's twice in the last week, and Mrs. Stone said you did the same in her class."

"Sorry. It won't happen again."

"Maybe a call to your parents is in order." Mr. Haywood returned the books to Adan's desk and walked away.

Adan fought the urge to say, "Yeah, well, if you find my parents let me know." He'd drawn enough attention.

His gaze flicked across the room to where Garran dwarfed his tiny desk. Their gazes met, and his lips tightened as if to hold back the same comment. But it would've come out more like, "I'm not sure you'll find them, Mr. Haywood, since Adan's mom left him at a shelter seventeen years ago." But Garran looked away, a muscle in his jaw twitching.

Jealousy didn't sit well on the overgrown man-child. Their Guardian gave Adan what the other boy thought should be his. Never mind that Adan didn't want it.

The bell rang, signaling the end of the day, and he made his way to his locker. The hallways cleared as students rushed off to one party or another. Tonight, people from all over would migrate to the city to celebrate the Festival of Alvar.

As he slammed his locker, someone barreled into his arm. The well-placed blow shot fiery pain through his already raw skin.

"Didn't see you there, *Dreamer*." Garran spat the word like a curse. "How's the arm?"

Probably bleeding now. "What do you want?"

The meathead lumbered closer. "You think you're better than everyone—Uzziah's golden child. I have no idea why he keeps you and your brat little brother around."

Adan bristled at the mention of Ben.

"But I can tell you one thing. You're a Dreamer—whatever that is—but you're marked by a Strength Wielder. You're going to be a disappointment to every person you come across."

Something hot bubbled up inside Adan, but he clamped his mouth shut. Some secrets he had to hold close.

Usually, he'd stand his ground and fight. But no one without the Strength Gift would be foolish enough to square off against a Strength Wielder.

"Hey, what's going on down there?" Both boys jerked toward the voice echoing down the hall. Their principal, Mr. Kelsey, strode toward them, dress shoes clicking on the worn linoleum floor.

A smile widened Garran's irritating mouth. He slung an arm over Adan's shoulder.

Adan hissed at the pressure but kept his expression neutral.

"Oh, nothing," Garran called out. "Just having a discussion."

When the man reached them, he paused to look them over, likely noting Adan didn't share Garran's ease. "Boys, there's no fighting on the school campus."

"Oh no, we weren't fighting. Only a minor disagreement. I'm headed out anyway." With a laugh, Garran extracted his arm from Adan's shoulder. "Did you know Adan fell asleep in English again?" He shook his head and started down the hall.

Great. Here came another lecture. But before Mr. Kelsey could begin, Garran yelled back as he pushed out the double doors. "See you tonight, Adan."

It was a promise.