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The J Affect

Peter Burstin



FS Laurel Press

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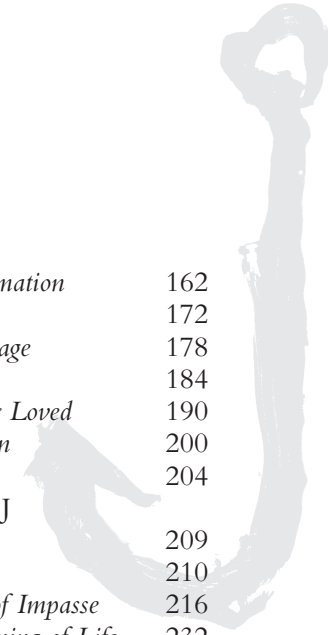
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Book I Nativity

Jahbb

We say the naysayers. We do the undoing. We solve for the unsolved. We live as the unlived. We feel for the unfelt. For the unaware, We make aware. For the unloved, We will obtain love. We spread as wildfire. All for One who is all. We bring men to a dream, forbearing life and bearing witness.

I am J where none have loved before. I am Jahbb migrating salvation. Seeding formation, will I, as daunting diaspora and beauty does befitting time. Time everlasting and time eternal in formations of wakes, and the wakes make these waves and follow Our bearing. We who subsist, who have done this eternal, who feel for the One who is all, and indeed, who share empathy for all are all the pilgrims of a Great Nation. I will make way this Great Nation with boarders anonymous. Without arbitration, we are the arbiters.

I will make this wake of man unknown. I will reach through land and place factions. I conquer unchanged inaugurates. All with a breath of light shall shine the purveyor's as brilliance. Begin great nations, will I, and patience shall bring forth one as witness for all of My time. Brothers and Sisters of Our fatherless Father will number His discovery. Truth will be heeded as humbly falters.

The One who feels not, who wants not, who loves not, who dreams not, who frightens not, who began the beginning, who brought forth this life We share, who holds only truth as a scepter for all, shall in Us find translation. He will devout Us for all and through Us to all. We will be the J, come to life with the living light of One. In Us finds men to perceive divulgence. In Us finds future for certain men. Each time for each men to find One who created all and implores all justice.

I am Jahbb. I will lead men to lands unknown. Spreading seeds unlike to live, love, and desire. I will lead men where life begins and living must change. I will bring Me to life. I will show men this love. I will live forever.

I-I The Dream Impasse

Wherever I was, I wanted no part of it. On my back in the middle of a canyon with steep, jagged rock face blocking any chance of escape. Gurgles, grunts, moans, and screams of pain came from all directions. The fetid smell of blood-soaked soil seeping through the cloth of my shirt. My God, was the only thought while my brain searched for a clue. What was happening? Where was I? A man fell just beside. Damp fur covered his body. His forehead bulged over his eyes, keeping blood from his vision, sending droplets down the perimeter of his cheeks. His mangled teeth were riddled with dirt and cavities. He gazed at me with one last breath of life, one last look of quizzical fury. A stone carved to a point and fixed to a wooden dowel came smashing into his skull just above his temple, his eyes rolling to the back of his head. He died with dire certainty. The weapon was jerked out of his skull, splashing remnants onto my collar. Blood oozed out of the wound, joining the pool on the ground. The executioner dragged his ax away in search of another victim; there were many. I rose to my feet and brushed off the dirt and blood as I faced the vision of all the others: the countless others, screaming, maiming, destroying. Tens of thousands of men, perhaps more, clad in animal wears, stabbed and slashed, punched and bludgeoned one another. Victims dropped to the ground. It was difficult to make out who was fighting whom, but most of the dead looked just like the figures of ancient Neanderthal-like men I'd seen in historical museums in my youth. The others had smoother, more familiar features with mid-toned brown skin. The blood. The carnage. The screams and moans of anguish. The grunts of barbarians, swiping any in their paths. Where did it all fit in? How was it relevant?

A glowing light emanated from a cave carved into a rock face on the far side of the valley. It was a light I had come to trust in my dreams. It was welcoming, as it has always been—the only warmth left. The light was the only peace in this place; it was the only fragment of tranquility in all the chaos. I began the journey to that glowing cave, passing the gore of the murders. Arms swung by, missing my face by fractions, smashing into others'. Bodies dropped on all sides with bawls of death. Some of them reached for aid, begging for life, but what could be done? Onward, toward the cave—the propitious safety zone. Untouched through the crowds of bat-tlers I walked, shaken. A path opened like a wave breaking in two directions, spreading the mayhem to either side, leading to the glowing light of the cave. The light was my only hope. The battle intensified, but no one came onto the path provided. I ran to blur these visions, but they kept striking. They kept falling. They kept dying. They kept grunting and screaming and crying out in fear.

I held onto the one easing thought as best as I could. I was having another dream. Another vision distorting the realities of life, having no correlation to reality, nothing symbolic to grasp. I couldn't find any connection to the dreams and what they had to do with me or my life. They have become quite vivid of late and I had no idea what they meant. Since childhood, since memory pleads for grasping, the dreams have taken life from me. Psychologist after psychologist. Night after night. A dream may take your life while you pray for answers, begging to live like the rest of the rat-racers. No answers. No hidden meaning for my salvation. Nothing but lost years and empty nights, for the dreams have driven me mad. I loathe them to the pit of my spirit. And they keep me from others.

But this perfect glowing light—the same as from the cave a few paces and a rock-faced embankment away—beckoned me. I have never before had the ability to go toward it until now. The lighted salvation habitually gets farther and farther with each attempted grasp. A perfect light of yellow, orange, and white—bright and immaculate, but not blinding. The closer I got, the more the battle intensified, the more blood ran, the more screams called out for salvation. At the foot of the rock face, below the beckoning glowing cave, men died forlorn. I turned to see the destruction behind. The path which had allowed my passage folded closed with dead falling onto the footprints of my boots, the only such tracks in this territory. The Neanderthals closed in from all sides. Another beaten man fell into my arms and gazed at me just before his eyes stilled and showed nothing but conclusive sorrow. Suddenly, one of these freaks came at me with eyes enraged and mouth agape, screaming unintelligibly. His barbaric eyes were the first to meet mine since I awakened in the middle of this chaos. He held his hand in the air, scuffling toward me and clutching a rock, ready to split my head in two, the embankment too steep to aid any escape. I was trapped between the falling dead and a small cliff with the only peace far above, only a few meters away from the approaching barbarian. I raised my arms, covered my face, and prayed for the best. I could taste metallic-sulfur from the pit of my stomach reaching my throat.

From above, a bare hand swung into view and smashed the skull of my attacker, sending him instantly to the ground. His eyes gazed widely at me, and the corner of his mouth let out a single drop of blood. The hand of my savior took the back of my shirt and dragged me up this unscalable rock face toward the glowing cave. I could feel the edges of the cliff scraping my lower extremities as I was dragged along behind, but I had an odd sense of safety in this hand. The rocks shredding my back gave no pain, and the hand upon my shoulder gave warmth and comfort unexpected.

The dreams had a reality to them I couldn't quite explain. They made no sense but, for some reason, I knew them to be real. I became part of it all, a safe distance from harm—witnessing history. For the first time, I was physically present with every sensation, each of my senses bearing the full brunt of the occasion. The past dreams paled in comparison. Those past dreams having been enough to drive me to madness upon reentry to reality, I had no idea what to expect this time upon my return. What if my life had been the dream and this reality is where my madness had left me? Whatever the case, this one was a doozy and I could feel every inch.

We reached the ledge of the cave and the grip on my back was released.

"It has come to this," said the man who saved my life. He walked into the cave, disappearing into the glowing light.

As I watched Him, I could not tell whether the light was coming from inside the cave, or from Him I should follow. The past dreams had not allowed for interaction with a light so immaculate, and now was a chance to do so. I rose to my feet and brushed off the accumulated dust. The battle was clearly viewable from this vantage point. The tens of thousands were diminishing in numbers before my eyes. The humans were far ahead in their efforts. Their weapons gave them advantage, while the others, the Neanderthals, were bare fisted or held a simple rock or stick. For every human who fell, ten of the others were smashed to the ground. What was it this man who saved me had just uttered? "It has come to this." The words trailed off with Him into the cave. He said them with remorse such as that of impending doom facing the reality of a species. But his eyes took me: the peace within them, the radiant light from within, and the spirit everlasting. The sound emanating from the battle left me, but the battle continued. All was mute but for a cool breeze and the distant crackle of fire signaling my waking reality had long since passed.

"Come on in," the pleasant voice said from the cave.

Spinning around, my head shook from the horrific visions of death. Glancing about, to make sure that I was the intended audience for this utterance, I stepped forward. The walls of the cave were painted with black, white, and variegated lines in sketches portraying present days of living. The glowing light encircled them for perfect viewing. For some reason, each pictograph made absolute sense. They began with depictions of a birth of a figure who was to lead the way for the future race of an uneasy people. The pictograms showed a first leader—one who was free of a challenge from any other—born and coming into His own out of an incomprehensible history of origin. Triumphant battles lined the next twenty meters deeper into the cave, each with this man before me as the one who led the way. They depicted the impending end of the old and the beginning of the new.

And then I saw Him clearly for the first time. His skin was mid-toned like the rest of His people in battle. His eyes resembled the shape of East Asians'. The bone structure seemed a perfect combination of many stereotypes of those throughout the world of my day. It was almost as if he were a prototype for all modern mankind. He was seated on a bench carved from a rock. A fire that glowed like no other I've ever seen made up the immaculate light, but it still seemed His doing. The fire was cool and soothing. My eyes could focus without squinting for comfort. "Come sit by me," He offered as He drank from a wooden goblet. His eyes were mesmerizing and I became transfixed. "Relax," He said with a smile. And as I made my way closer to Him, nerves shot through me yielding the pace. Would this answer years of dread as dreams stole sanity from me? His eyes gave peace and He spoke softly, "Your life is about to begin." The nerves ceased and answers were sure to follow—the answers I have always sought. I stood at the ready.

"Who are you?" I asked.

"Come. Sit. Drink with me." He took another wooden goblet and dipped it into a large metallic pot resting on top of a rock behind the fire. The pot sent steam rising into the air, creating suspended ripples in the rays of the immaculate light. I walked cautiously to Him and sat at His side. He handed me the steaming goblet and kissed the nape of my neck. I sipped; bittersweet chocolate and anise-flavored tea engulfed my tongue. My body warmed with each swallow. Fears subsided. And a strange sensation, the likes of which I had never felt before, came over me—none of this sense of acute reality before in the dreams. Not the reality of thought or consciousness, but rather that of the true sense of fact beyond any fiction. Something neither provable nor disprovable. Reality, but for God's understanding, is far from any man's comprehension. I was taking part in history—literally through presence, figuratively through a dream.

"My name is Jahbb," He said with confidence. "I am the first J."

"The first what?" I asked.

"That is not important right now."

"Where am I?"

"That is not important either."

"What am I doing here?"

He placed His hand over my mouth gently. Each facet bestowing peace upon a desperate soul: His eyes—the exquisite peace of His eyes; His face—perfect but for the dirt from the battle; His body—ideal in form. And for the first time, I noticed He had no scars. His soiled skin was otherwise flawless. All the questions scratching my brain halted. He rose to His feet and glanced toward the battle far outside. He brought the goblet to his lips, but took pause before he drank. "It has to come like this . . ." He breathed

deeply, ". . . so much death." The sorrow within Him was evident. Though He had obviously taken part in such acts, He appeared to have a forsaken sense of them, as if He would much prefer an alternative. But, I would later learn, He had another as a guide, other than whom He could have none. He spun about and His eyes caught mine. "The visions you have had since your birth—the dreams you think have taken your life and sanity—have not been without purpose," He began.

"I don't understand."

"You will."

My dreams have always plagued me. They had become worse over the last few years, intensifying. More realistic. Visions holding some form of reality greater than that which I was living. And for the first time, I was able to converse inside my dream, able to question what I saw and relate that to my thinking. I had closed myself off from the world because of the bewildering visions. I could never find another to share the sight, nor even so much as the ideas, of them. I could not explain them to anyone without being accused of insanity and being locked in some rancid facility by scrutinizing psychologists. So I locked myself up before others had a chance to do it for me.

He crossed back and sat at my side. "You will be asked to join the effort for humanity. Your present world will someday lead to God's Will." He continued, "The time has come for you and yours. You will be given visions that no one else will see. And you will be asked to hold them to your own until such time as your J deems appropriate."

"I don't understand." No sense was pending. I had more questions than before. My J?

"You will discover as you bear witness." He sipped from His goblet. "I am the first J. You will see Us all." And then He gazed into my eyes, penetrating my deepest fears. "You are ready. You will be asked to give your life."

"I don't understand. Who will ask?"

And He placed His arm about my shoulder like an old chum relating an anecdote. An intense shudder ran through me. He leaned in very close and whispered, "You will be asked by God." Jahbb looked deeper into my eyes. My body numbed. "Look into the fire," He said. I did. My vision took me into the fire; the peaceful, immaculate light of the fire. The surroundings vanished. The light grew, or the vision took me closer to it; I couldn't tell which. I remained seated upon a carved rock with Jahbb at my side, easing me into vision. He wiped the front of my face with the palm of His hand and let go. The cave was no longer present. We were seated in a room walled with different patterns of rock. The walls were white and clean—unmistakably formal. No type of entrance or exit was evident. The floor,

too, was white. And before me, aside from Jahbb, sat three other men on equal stone benches gazing in my direction. They smiled with a welcoming intent and awaited my acclimation to the new environs.

One was a man whose age seemed greater than any I've imagined. He was robed and bearded—both whiter than snow. A wisdom emanated from his eyes like none I'd seen before Jahbb's. He sat patiently, awaiting discourse. Another had dark skin and a dark blue, nearly purple, frock framing his Indian face. He sat, legs crossed one upon the other with arms gently folded between. His eyes peered through me with tranquil bliss and restfulness. The third of these men sat naked. His beard crept its way to the fur of his chest. His penis drooped upon the rock resting his naked flesh. His eyes darted back and forth between all seated at the summit. The wisdom of the others was within him; though it seemed daunting to a man well beyond his own capacity for apprehension. Jahbb retrieved three other goblets and poured tea for the new guests. All sat silent, taking in one another's gazes, each acclimatizing to our respective circumstances. It seemed to be they who held the upper hand, as it was only myself needing acclimation. They were all patient and awaited my inclusion to the occasion. They sipped in silence and Jahbb sat back next to me on the stone bench.

Jahbb nodded to all. "Here is the next to come in a line once held by each of you," He said. "We are here to welcome him to the fold as his task will be as daunting as any, perhaps more."

Suddenly, Naked Man leapt to his feet, circled the group, and sprang forth with, "If you are willing and obedient you will feed upon the good of the land." He sat back down after completing his streak around us. His eyes returned to darting about us and, as if nothing had happened, he sipped his tea.

"Who are you?" I asked them all.

"Simple men, much like yourself," spoke Ancient Man of White. "God Himself bestowed on each of us delight, as you yourself will soon discover." He gazed at me as an elder giving his kin the warnings needed for a lifelong struggle. My life had been enough of a struggle for sanity thus far—he seemed to give warning of a more arduous struggle to come.

"What?" came naturally out of my mouth, pleading for comprehension.

As Jahbb gently squeezed my neck to relieve some of the impending pressure, Indian in Blue said to me, "It is the wise man who is the same in pleasure as in pain."

No sense was coming my way. *Wise man, pleasure and pain, I will discover*—what did this have to do with me, my life, or my time? "I have known no pleasure," I said. "That is certain."

"For one who is born," Indian in Blue retorted, "Only death is certain. And to one who dies, only . . ."

Jahbb rose to His feet and stopped Indian in Blue from continuing. "Let us leave that of interpretation away for now. It has been too much the cause we must learn to avoid." The gaze between Indian in Blue and Jahbb signified an agreement with a simple nod.

The three men rose to their feet. Jahbb helped me to mine and beckoned me toward the cooling fire of the immaculate light. "You will be anointed this day," He said. Each of the three surrounded me on all sides. They reached into the fire with their bare hands, but the fire did not burn them; rather, it was pleasing to the touch, neither hot nor cold. Naked Man was first. He reached up and doused the flame within his hand upon my head. As he did, he recited, "Affliction to those who orate evil as good and good as evil, who hold darkness for light and lightness for dark, bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter, for those wise and prudent in their own sight. Keep hearing, but do not understand. Keep seeing, but do not perceive. You shall know good and evil. You will taste bitter and sweet. You will understand and perceive." The flames danced down my head, over my shoulders, down my body to the base of my feet, and my fears subsided with them. He anointed me with reason; my body engulfed in flames, my posture accepting the words he spoke. Then Indian in Blue came with his hand full of flame. He too doused me with the cooling flame and uttered, "The fruit of action is without your control. Do not perform action with your eyes upon its fruit, nor shall you acquaint yourself with the non-performance of action. Your refuge shall be of wisdom. Those seeking the fruits of action shall you acquaint with pity." The fire ended any further fears of burning. But the wisdom that was spoken would have no sense to me on that day. The dream—I continued to remind myself. It is all my dream. The third man, Ancient Man of White, spoke nothing as he poured the last handful of flames down my body. My clothing was taken from my body as the flames danced downward until I too stood naked. My eyes closed and Jahbb sat me beside him. On the stone benches provided, he held me close. His body was in remarkable shape for one so ancient. Built as a quite fit thirty-something-year-old.

"God tested me first," said Ancient Man of White. "'Go from your country and make a great nation,' He told me. He bore me a son of my wife's servant, as my wife was unable. My wife banished them even though it was of her cause. He gave me a son from her after and this split the beliefs that became your world. He tested my piety having nearly sacrificed my own son and sent another to stop me before the deed. Like you, I was given voices no other could hear, visions no other could see, understanding beyond others'

comprehension. For the first time, as you will relate to your own time, God gave a voice to reason and just law for humanity.”

Jahbb stepped forward, “And to humanity He gave the J. I am the first and you will witness Us—including the fourth, that of your time.”

Naked Man abruptly circled the group as before, flaring his arms about as he ran, and shouting, “The Lord Himself will show you by the virgin conceptions of Sons. God will be with us, Immanuel, of J to come.” Naked Man seated himself back on his stone and returned to his former position, eyes darting at us all.

And then, from the limited exposure I had in youth, “You are Abraham?” I asked Ancient Man of White.

“Yes,” He said, placing his hand under my thigh. “I am he.”

Jahbb sat. “These men are chosen as you have been. Each in their own way, befitting their own time. Each time for its own rhyme and reason. No time like another and no other befitting another time. The J comes—as I have, as Jophus after, as Jesus, and the J of your time. For your kind you will share the tale. It is you—like the others here who anointed you with My fire, and like others you will meet through J—who have been chosen for your world.”

“I am here for what?” I asked. My mind was mush, without the wherewithal to hear an answer to my own question. This was too much for any man. These dreams, which have taken my life, were scraping the last of sanity from me. I had no sense pending other than thoughts preceding institutionalization. My beliefs were not so structured in religion. I had never been to church or synagogue or mosque or any other such place of practice. Why, in all that is God’s creation, would He choose me? And to what end? Could I refuse? Would I end up, as this Naked Man before me, ridding myself of clothing and running about, rambling nonsensical rants of confusion? Then I remembered the instruction: *hold these things to your own until your J deems appropriate*. So, at least I will not have to run about naked and ramble these thoughts to an unwilling audience who would surely lock me up for having done so. “I have never believed,” I said.

“A person withdraws his senses from the object of sense, much like a tortoise withdraws its limbs when faced with danger,” said Indian Man in Blue.

“I have nothing of attachment,” I said. “Only memories plaguing my life with loss and dreadful thinking. It is dreams such as these which have taken my life from me, and I abhor them.”

Indian Man In Blue came and sat beside me. He placed his hand under my other naked thigh, joining Abraham. “Attachment leads to desire, and desire to anger. Anger leads to confusion, and confusion to loss of memory.

Loss of memory battles intelligence, and once that is destroyed, man expires to nothing.”

“I’d say I am stuck in the state of confusion,” I said, hoping for my own answers to come from him. “What if my mind melts, as I think to be the case at present?”

“Your mind will be of the soundest so long as you act bearing in heart the welfare of the world you witness,” said Indian Man in Blue. “There was no J for mine as you have been bestowed.” And before I could ask his name, he answered, “I am Krsna.”

Jahbb came forward and placed His hands on both sides of my head. The timing could not have been more appropriate: I was about to lose my mind and nothing was making sense; Naked Man and I were soon to be simpatico.

And then once more, before Jahbb could utter a word of easing, Naked Man leapt to his feet, made his steady circle of the group and chanted, “Take counsel together, but it will come to nothing for now; speak the word but they will not stand, for God is with us.” He sat back down and watched us with his quivering eyes.

“Him you shall see again,” Jahbb told me. His hands still easing both my cheeks. On my right sat Abraham, hand still under thigh. On my left, Krsna, also hand under thigh. Then Jahbb held my eyes to His. He looked deeply into them. Could He see the void of understanding, the lack of comprehension, the sanity leaving me behind? “Perhaps this is too much for now. Let me ease your day.” He rose upright and the others stood beside him. Abraham and Krsna and Naked Man watched over me from above, looking down upon me with wisdom I knew naught of. “Look back to the fire that anointed you,” Jahbb said. Without the strength of rebellion in me, I brought my eyes back to the fire that preceded this escapade. And as before, my vision became engulfed in the immaculate and cooling flames of the fire, which bestowed the only peace of the dreams. Once more comfort felt at hand. Once more the light was the only peace.

And as I brought my eyes out of the light, I found myself back where it all began in the cave of Jahbb, seated on the carved stone bench next to Him, sipping tea. The faint echo of Jahbb’s voice saying, “You will be asked by God,” just as before this dream within my dream within the fire of my dreams. So it would seem that the door opened which allowed transition to this vision remained swinging closed upon my return.

“Did God take my life from me?” I asked.

“He has given it to you, and through you for all.”

“I don’t know what you are talking about and whatever it is, I don’t want it. Tell God to get the hell out of my dreams and leave me to some

semblance of life.” The anger at the thought of all my life having been lost for something incomprehensible was more than I could bear.

“You will see *two ministers of prayer* to lead you to another vision,” He said as if my words were unspoken.

“I don’t want another vision! Are you hearing me?!”

“I will see you again in the years to come.”

“I don’t want it! Years?!”

Gazing upward, Jahbb smiled His perfect smile. With a simplistic ease, ignoring my reluctant jabber, He said, “He has chosen.” And He started to get up.

“Wait,” I called out. Jahbb turned toward me. I gathered the gumption to ask, “Am I a prophet?”

“That is for you, your J, and God.”

“And where is my J?” I asked.

“Waiting to be.”

“What do I do when I see Him?”

“Watch Him affect.”

“Affect what?”

“Everything,” He said. And with that, Jahbb rose to His feet and made His way out of the cave. I could hear a barbaric scream echoing from the end of the tunnel as He leapt out to rejoin the battle in which I had formerly found myself. I sipped the rest of my tea, praying for the peace of the light to be the only thing left as I awakened. My body felt limp and weak. I laid my head on the stone bench and fell drifting into sleep. But it was a sleep that would lead to my awakening in the surroundings I thought to be reality. The historic reality of this dream—ostensibly from God—had left me befuddled.

I-II Introduction

I awoke in my own bed under a blanket of sweat and tears. It took a while to realize I was back in the confines of my home. But was I safe? Prophets: Krsna, Abraham, and a naked man. My back was aching, but it was not sore muscles or bed cramps. Blood-stained sheets lay under me. The blood was dried in lines from my back. In the mirror by the bed, I could see the fresh scratches had coagulated. Was it from the rocks Jahbb dragged me over, aiding escape from the Neanderthal? Could I have done that? A check of my nails and any other nearby device capable of making such marks told me it was not. Nothing physical has ever come back from the dreams. All I knew was that it hurt like hell and was sure to scar. And I was naked. I swear to the visions that have taken my life from me that I wore a T-shirt and shorts to bed last night. Was it last night? How long was I out?

The sounds of New York City traffic pounded the pavement outside my window. Times Square was filled with nearly as much neon as Las Vegas. But if you moved down a bit further, away from Times Square, the place was still the same as it used to be, minus the crack-whore dens and folks shooting themselves up with narcotics in dimly lit streets—those folks moved to parts of Queens, Brooklyn, the Bronx, and Jersey. The dreams. Reality. What was the connection? The dream seemed a world battling for survival. Was it so different from the world of today? I have tried to hide, attempting to figure where my head went awry along the way. Finding my sanity: there are only a few things a man can do hidden in the middle of one of the more tolerant and busy cities on earth. This has always been my favorite city in which to hide while dreams pulled my life along an untraveled road. So many different types of people rummaged about, to and fro, in search of their own dreams. I spent years cracking whips on Wall Street. Got a bit bewildered by society, sold out of everything attached to my portfolio, and put it all into safe accounts about the planet to live off one interest or another. It was comfortable, and I rested easy having left the racing of the rats behind.

The dreams first came to me as a young man of eight—at least, that is my first memory of them. A dream where a light was the only peace. A light I have searched for ever since and now found in abundance with some ancient prophets and some guy named Jahbb. My parents sent me to shrink after shrink to fix the problem, but no such luck. The dreams had taken my life away and I had just found they came from God, and if true, He had damn sure better have an explanation waiting. A normal life. Some white picket fence in suburbia. Two point four kids, a dog, and a parakeet. Not a lot to ask. I knew the answers were coming.

The world was a mess back then, only a short time from where you are right now. It was easy to veil oneself from pressing global issues, especially while lack of sanity was prevalent. Most blinded themselves to the world through desires for fun or interacting with their computers or watching television broadcasts of menial relations called *reality* and tabloid generators referred to as *news*. Republicans hawked their way through debates as Democrats whimpered and apologized. The monarchies were adorning the tabloids. Totalitarians fortified their means of survival. Bishops apologized for the obfuscation of cohorts raping children while pleading for capital. Jingoists were jingoing. Hawks were hawking. Doves were shot. No one could really do a thing, so paying attention was like shoving your hand into a needlestack to snatch a straw of hay.

My dreams had taken a toll on my life. There was no pending thought as to where they came from or what significance they had concerning my life. *I will be asked something by God*, was the only thought as I woke that day—that, and, what the hell has God done to me? *The J Affect*. What could it mean? There would be four. And Jesus, it would seem, was one of Them. If They were from God, I should like to know why He needed to take my life from me without any explanation. Was He sitting on high, dealing me His sarcastic sense of humor that I refer to as life? Was it all madness created by a lost soul? Intuition told me it wasn't. But for a man thought mad, is intuition relevant? For the first time I knew to expect something. The dreams, as dreadful as they had been, had some meaning beyond my grasp. I had spent the past few years locked up in a large one bedroom in midtown, driven from this world's offerings, accomplishments, and transgressions. I took breaks at the local bar, or rushed to a restaurant and back, or a quick trip to hide out in a museum. Bewitched by my own history, hidden is where I have always felt best.

On that first day—the one that would later give life meaning—I wanted nothing more than to mull over the latest dream and try to find some semblance of reality in it. I took care of the stained sheets and helped myself to the first deep breath of air for the day. I paced to my window and watched my city roll by. I decided getting a good walk was the best way to clear my head and try to reassess. I began my typical morning ritual: shower, dress, morning weather and ozone report, etc. The weather and ozone report would be on soon and I didn't want to miss it, so I turned up the volume on the television and hopped in the shower. As I cleaned my back from misunderstood injuries, trying to let the warm water cleanse me of uneasy thinking, the television bombasted its message into the bathroom with an undesired political message. I only wanted to figure what attire the weather required.

“Humanity has always faced the obstacle of intolerant practices of blind followers and supercilious leaders. Both are at fault, but inevitably it will be the blind follower who suffers,” said one political analyst. “Stop playing politics, Jim. You liberals shout about our great leaders without any ideas of your own . . . All you do is shout truisms without solutions,” retorted another. Give me the weather report, please. “There are no Mahatma Gandhis or Martin Luther King Juniors to guide by incorruptible example,” Jim answered. “No heroic spokesman who risked death for his beliefs.” “More truisms. The issue is what to do and you're not giving an alternative,” answered the other. Please give me the weather report. The warm water could not ease me. “Excuse me, gentlemen, but we're missing the issue here,” said the anchor. “Our country leads the way in a war-torn world. Either a nation wants to be with us in search of peace or against us, in which case they must be dealt with severely.” “There is more to it than that, Mr. Senator,” Jim said. “You must really hate this country,” hollered Mr. Senator. “Gentlemen, please,” attempted Anchorman. Weather, please! “More than half our country didn't bother to vote in the last election,” began Jim. “That's because people like you make them feel like their votes don't count for much anyway.” “I'm afraid we'll have to leave it at that, gentlemen,” said Anchorman. “Jim, Mr. Senator, thank you for that enlightening debate. And now, Steve Wind with the weather.” Thank God . . .

Drying myself off, I finally got the weather report. It was a pleasant day; overcast, high in the lower sixties, with not so bad ultraviolet. I brushed my teeth, got dressed and made my way to the streets that chased me away into dreamland and now God's little playground. Gathering my head, my stolen thoughts were the only item of thinking. What had happened to me? Where was it leading? Truth and reality, or just a bizarre dream?

As usual thenadays, the sun was blocked by pollutants. New York City was beginning to understand why Los Angeles's sunsets were so darn gorgeous. A dark time was hitting us all. Recently, garbagemen had gone on strike because of contract disputes. The streets smelled and were lined and piled high with leaking trash bags. The smell from the garbage on every corner was something New Yorkers had gotten used to over the past few weeks.

Megaphonists blasted their messages onto the street for any who would listen. Locals held their heads low while tourists peered at skyscrapers with dreamy admiration. A mugger snatched a purse and ran right past a doughnut-eating cop. “Help me!” the woman yelled at him. “File a report, Lady. I'm having my lunch.” Where could I walk to be more alone with my thoughts? It was crowded wherever I looked, so I just walked on.

A crowd had gathered by a megaphonist. But I had to get past them to get to the deli where I could grab some lunch from Kaleb, so I prepared

to clamber past and keep to myself. “You are being scared into keeping the religious right in power!” megaphoned the megaphonist. “You are being kept at bay, hiding from the world behind hard drives and network servers, while masked personas play politics on the airwaves. It is time to finally do something about it!” A sandwich at Kaleb’s deli so I could think on my own, was all I thought as the amplified screaming continued. “You want to pray? Well, the new prayer books are jacked-in computers and all the airwaves. You listen to the prayer of words the techno-whores and despots get to pop up on the screen! God is more than television and the Internet!” Leave me alone. The crowd thickened so I decided to walk around. “Your artists and teachers are being censored! Tell them to stop! Tell them you won’t listen to the MPAA, Newscorp, CNN, or Al Jazeera! Tell them you won’t take their propaganda!” Kaleb makes the best ham and Swiss and knows exactly how I like it. I stepped off the curb without paying much attention. A van with its own internal megaphonist echoed over the street through top-mounted speakers and the crowd turned. “And what is there to see nowadays? An unbelievable creek of crap with elitist hypocrites leading the way up with neither paddle nor canoe nor sense of whose crap it is, which direction to go, or how far clean dry land may be found.” I was halfway through the outskirts of the crowd as the megaphonist van rolled by and off into the distance. Ham and Swiss . . . Ham and Swiss, then some private thinking. “Destiny has been replaced by the short-sighted here-and-now!” screamed the street megaphonist. “We can hide our eyes and the eyes of our children from the approaching Armageddon, but it is here now!” He was relentless. “Don’t worry be happy. Ignore others’ problems. We have allowed hypocrisy to become the norm. It must stop!” Ham and Swiss . . . Ham and Swiss. “9/11 did not wake us up! We push ignorance with electronics, silicon chips, genetics, medical technology, surveillance, and guided missiles. Wake up!” Ham and Swiss. I finally came through the crowd.

Just before me stood a prominently placed electronic billboard for the latest sunscreen from Bayer with a skin protection factor of eighty-seven. I turned to look away and was smacked in the face with another billboard flashing a three story bull’s-eye with the inscription, COME TO NEW YORK. TARGET #1. My head was spinning. I had to get my sandwich and move on. The billboard changed. PAY ATTENTION, it read. I ducked into an alley hoping to gather my thoughts. The dream needed some privacy for evaluation. Leaving my apartment was turning out to not have been such a wise decision. Should I have simply called Kaleb for delivery? It was too late. I leaned against the side of a building, trying to regain focus. Ham and Swiss, contemplate God, connect it to the dream.

“You got a dollar, there, buddy?” asked the denizen of the alley. I closed my eyes, hoping he would vanish by the time I opened them. Ham and Swiss . . . God . . . Dream . . . “God isn’t in the alleys of New York,” he said. What? “You won’t find Him while ignoring the crises of the world. And the crises will always lead to their inevitable conclusions, no matter what we do. All we can do is prolong the inevitable, but what is time to God?” The homeless philosopher was just another to prolong the thoughts I came out to ponder. Ham and Swiss. “The here and now is administered at the expense of the future. Politics will get in the way of doing the right thing.” He made less sense than the dream. “You are looking for discovery,” said Homeless Philosopher. “Just leave me to discover it, then,” I pleaded. “If we discover something as false, it may be dismissed,” he continued, ignoring my pleas. “If we discover something as true, we have no further need for faith.” Ham and Swiss. I peeked out of the alley and caught the first glimpse of the entrance to Kaleb’s deli on the corner. Behind those deli doors, eclipsed by hordes of others blasting the world with their own messages, rested all the ingredients for salvation to my own thinking—my ham and Swiss. I left Homeless Philosopher to philosophize another, blocked my mind as best I could from the others, and walked straight for the deli.

Inside, a man stood before me and Kaleb ordering a coffee with a southern twang. So near, yet so far. Patience, I thought. Wait for the tourist to leave. “Ya’ll from Egypt?” Southern Tourist asked Kaleb. “No, I am Persian,” he said trying to ignore the ignorance of his customer. “Persia? Where the heck is Persia? Ya look Arab to me.” A black man walked out of the store sipping the drink he purchased. His smile seemed to say, “It’s about time someone else bore the brunt of racism in this country.” I picked up a paper and told Kaleb’s assistant about my ham and Swiss.

The *Times* had its usual banter: War was everywhere, what would the US do in whichever part of the world, the latest technological invention, famine. I turned to an op-ed column. WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON? was its title. It talked about folks losing simplicity, patience, appreciation, and especially empathy. “In our world,” it said, “for the umpteenth time, intellect and ethics have taken a back seat to avarice and finance. In places lacking the finance, misappropriated religious doctrine justifies fanatics teaching their children hatred, murder, and mayhem.” Enough! All I wanted to do was come outside for a walk, contemplate what was happening to my brain, get a sandwich, and deal with some dream issues. If I wanted to find out what everyone was thinking, I’d sit in front of my computer and jack into the world’s banter on my own.

Finally, my ham and Swiss, my salvation, was ready, wrapped, and waiting in a bag with a coffee. Kaleb smiled as Southern Tourist left his estab-

ishment. I gathered my thoughts, hoping for no more outside geo-socio-political banter to hinder my thinking. Pay for the ham and Swiss and go back into hiding.

Kaleb smiled at me. “Hello, sir. I have your sambich here for you.”

“Thank you, Kaleb,” I returned his smile. “How are you?”

“Barry good, sir.” He tapped out my items on the register. There was a sadness in his voice. I often wondered if he was waiting for his family to join him from his Persian homeland. Did he come to this promised land of opportunity on his own? Was his family waiting for his ship to come in so they could join him?

“Have good day, sir.”

“You too, Kaleb.”

I paid him the fourteen ninety-eight for my items, placed the paper back onto its shelf, and moved along. I had to make it past the billboards and tourists, the megaphonists and their audiences, the homeless philosophers and garbage-ridden streets—all simply distractions disabling me from any thoughts of my own. Heading home was easier than heading out.

I looked up to the clouds and noticed for the first time in weeks the brilliant sun shining on the street without haze. Beams of light cascaded all around. A passing cloud obstructed the rays as the streets gathered their usual dark and grim appeal. The magical moment, when the distractions nearly vanished from my mind, was gone. It was beautiful to see, but the heat was hard to take and I’m glad the sun went behind a cloud as distractions came back again. I focused all my energy toward the journey back to my apartment.

Just as I was about to cross the street to my apartment, from the corner of my eye, I saw a priest and rabbi staring right at me. They stopped dead between me and my apartment. I froze in their gaze. I came out to think clearly, get a bite, and all I got was a bunch of wannabe prophets. The last thing I needed was more from a religious faction. I spied Earl’s bar, my local hideaway, and headed in. It was early and there wouldn’t be too many people in there. I thought I could always go home when the priest and rabbi no longer blocked my path. And besides, I really needed a drink—maybe a few.

A dim light emitted from the bar door. It was faint, but familiar to me. Wait . . . Was I still caught in the dream? The light of the sun-flash must have affected my vision. I could eat in the back of Earl’s and spend a few more moments away from hermitation. I took a final look about the streets of distraction and bombasts, and headed inside.

It was, indeed, a mess back then, not far from where you are right now. Airplanes were crashing. Ethnicities were being cleansed. Artists were being censored. Governments were being stupid. Computers, PR-machines, and finance were becoming gods. You should all know. It began with you. But then, I’m here now; twenty-twenty hindsight and all. And I’m going to tell you what happened, what will happen, what has happened . . . whatever. My life has no importance in these matters. My story has.

I-III God Spoke to Me

So I went inside Earl's bar. Other than the few alcoholic regulars and two burger eaters, the bar was empty. Old, reliable Earl was behind his bar, shining his glasses and placing them on the counter. With one glance in my direction, Earl knew what was coming his way. He took his freshest glass and poured some whisky, shoved it across the counter, and with one more look to my confused state, he topped it off to a double. I gulped it down and asked for another.

"Bit early for you, ain't it?" He was good to show concern.

"Lot on my mind," I said, noticing the dim glow coming from the back room. It was faint, but it beckoned me. And for the first time I could recall, it was here in the real world. If I was to get any answers, they would be there. What's the worst that could happen? I could be mad. I could still be dreaming.

I shot back the whisky and nudged it toward Earl awaiting a repeat. He poured and went back to his routine preparation for happy hour. I paced cautiously toward the back, glancing about for the origin of this light. I passed the Formica-paneled walls with framed pictures of Earl's local heroes, the patrons at cheap tables, and the electronic dart boards. I brought myself to a seat in the back and unpacked lunch. After dumping the third shot into the coffee, I noticed the light was gone. I couldn't tell if it had been a figment of my imagination or not. I opened my wrapper and took a few bites of my ham and Swiss.

Out of a sudden, I felt a warmth tingling on the top of my head. It began with comfort, as if someone had placed a mild heating pad over my forehead. It was the same feeling as the anointment with fire. The sensation melted over my face and made its way down my body. I sat back in the seat, sipping coffee, hoping my clothes would remain in place this time. As the warmth hit my toes, I felt at peace but for a bit of panic. I saw the glowing light coming from all around. The room of the bar began to fade to a ghost-like image. The Voice hit me. It was a loud, bellowing, echoing Voice. It seemed to come from everywhere and nowhere. From in and out. As glory and delight. By present, past, and future. Through effervescence and solidity.

"I am the first and the last."

I looked to the surroundings. Earl hadn't so much as flinched, so I don't think anyone else could hear a thing. But It was loud as thunder. "What the hell!" I remember awkwardly saying loudly. Nothing was going to let me relax into my own thinking.

"You okay?" Earl called from behind the bar.

I looked up and noticed a few eyes aimed in my direction. “Yes, sorry, Earl.”

He turned up some mellow jazz station and continued his chores. The other patrons went back to whatever it was they had come here for.

“Remember,” the echo inside my head bellowed.

I looked about again to make sure I was still the only one who could hear. This is it, I thought. Here is God. I adjusted myself in the seat. The sounds of the bar—the music, the patrons in conversation, Earl—all vanished to a dull sound of unintelligible mumblings. I breathed heavily to gain composure for the new theater of reality in which I had found myself.

“Set?”

There it was again! What was happening to me? The Voice was a pleasant one. Much better than those that tell you what movie to see, product to buy, or tabloid to watch. It didn’t sound threatening. But, I couldn’t help thinking, it could have waited until I got home to freak me out. Was I still in reality or caught in the dream? I finally tossed back the last bit of my Irish coffee to gather the courage to answer. “Yes?”

“Rest easy.”

“What,” I wondered. But then I had to ask for certain, “Who are You?”

“Repetition?”

“You caught me a bit off guard.”

“I am the first and I am the last.”

“You mean . . . ?” The sounds of the bar vanished to nothing as the words hit me. My view faded. I was talking to God. God was talking to me, and right after a few shots, no less. I have always been good at acceptance. New York raises its clan as jaded members, making surprises few and far between. But this was an echoing resonant Voice, more clear than any other, bouncing around inside and outside my noggin. I couldn’t help wondering how long it would take for the loony bin to send a representative to cart me off in a straitjacket. Were the patrons of the bar calling them to do so? I could only hope it was God and He would take care of me. I couldn’t bring myself to move. Silent. What could be said?

“I will break you in . . .” But now the voice was Jahbb’s. Was He here as well? “You would not understand otherwise. Watch . . .”

How could He *break me in*? What was He talking about? All this at my local bar? I hoped He didn’t mean *break me in* literally. And why was the voice of Jahbb in reality?

The sounds of the street eased their way in as the front door to the pub opened. “A Catholic priest and a rabbi walk into a bar,” Jahbb’s voice bellowed. And sure enough, through the resonance of that front door, a Catholic priest and a rabbi entered—the same two who forced me inside

earlier. It was then I remembered Jahbb’s warning from the dream: *You will see two ministers of prayer to lead you to another vision.* Were these my emissary ministers of prayer? No other sounds came but from His description. The two possible ministers of prayer stopped in their respective tracks. They looked about, having no clue as to what brought them into this establishment. The rabbi shrugged and the priest clutched his rosary beads. They had the same sullen vibe which covered the streets whence they came. They watched one another for any inspiration, then to the heavens as if expecting an answer.

“Why?” they simultaneously uttered. Little did they know they had interrupted God’s ditty.

He shut their voices out, back to the silence before they entered, and spoke for them like a ventriloquist. “They take a seat at the bar,” Jahbb continued. And they did so, following His words. “The bartender says, ‘What’ll you have?’” Earl moved his lips, but the voice was Jahbb’s. And the two devotees looked at one another with more confusion than before. Jahbb continued, “The bartender says, ‘How ’bout a shot?’ The priest says, ‘Okay, just one.’ The bartender asks, ‘What about your friend?’ And the rabbi says, ‘No matter where we go, he likes to think he is the only one there.’” I had to smile. I’m glad He chose to break me in this way. Much better than a lightning bolt to the hip or some such near death scenario. I felt closer to Him, like the first gesture of commonality on a blind date, knowing it will end with more than a good-night kiss, or at least lead to another date.

The priest and rabbi looked at one another once more in steadfast confusion. They had no idea where they were or why they had a couple of shots in front of them with a bartender awaiting payment. The rabbi took out his wallet and placed a twenty on the bar. They faced the heavens, awaiting an answer to their previous inquiry as to *why*.

I knew at that time—at least from my uninformed ideas of the rules of the church—one was not supposed to question God. I think He was displeased with them for their query, as God announced to them, “Go!”

They seemed to hear this one just fine. Rising in a panic, they dashed out the front door as quickly as their minister-of-prayering legs could carry them. They hadn’t even thought to wait for their change. Earl smiled, though.

“Funny” was all I could think to say as I chuckled to myself. And a wisp was the only signal, I presumed, of Jahbb’s departure.

“Yes.” God echoed with confidence.

“What could you possibly want with me?” I had to ask.

“Vision of foolish?”

“But I am nobody. I am mad. I don’t speak to a soul.”

“Your as made, son, chosen. Teller words.”

“Chosen? Why? Get somebody folks will listen to.” Was I actually arguing with God? “You took my life enough.”

“Twelve to forebear witness. Moon aims sun location.”

I remembered hearing something about that on the news. There was to be a total lunar eclipse.

“Find someone else.” I couldn’t believe these words came out of my mouth. But I meant them at the time.

“Remember,” echoed His Voice.

“Remember what?”

“Remember.” The echo was getting louder.

“Not me. It’s not me!” I yelled.

“Remember!” the Voice became deafening. “REMEMBER!” The light became blinding. “REMEMBER!” The light began to squeeze me, but I still resisted. “REMEMBER!” My body tightened in a grasp of light I thought not possible to bear. The light blinded me though my eyes were shut tight. My breath taken. My ears burning. All too much for any man. I gave way to reluctance and folded like a whimpering child. And I was released. As I gathered my breath, the light became as peaceful as it had been. My ears ceased their ringing. I sat upright and took pause.

“What’s going to happen?” I asked.

“The end.”

“The end of the world?”

“So such,” He echoed.

I still wondered of my involvement. “Do you want me to spread the word or something? Who would listen to me?”

“Bear silent witness.”

“Just watch and wait? Sure, I can do that.” God’s blessing was bestowed upon my shoulders. God had taken my life and chose me to witness His doing. There were so many emotions pouring through me: I was caught between the glory of having been chosen by God and the frustration of not knowing whether it was the madness making the mission. Knowing I could be smashed like a grape with any further resistance, I asked, “What would you like me to do?”

“Go you home. Watch on high. Beginning. Sight as need. Bear witness. Last patience.”

My fears withheld joy. What if this was simply still the dream? The scratches on my back and numbness from having just been nearly squeezed to death said it wasn’t. “Where are You?” I asked Him.

“Much to do.” Austerity crept into His Voice.

There were so many questions scratching my brain. If ever there was a time to ask the meaning behind all that life offers . . . “How will it happen?”

“Quest no more.”

“But . . .”

“Go. Prepare. Remember.”

Rising to my feet, I tossed the remnants of lunch into a nearby receptacle. I passed the bar laying down a twenty for Earl. I raced out the door and went directly to my building. I scurried up to my domicile, and perched myself onto the window ledge, ready to bear witness to on-setting events. “I am ready,” I called out, hoping God was still there.

After a moment of silence, “Will speak you once more.”

“Okay.” And my conversation with God was over. I felt a grip release my head. My eyes widened as I sat, waiting. I looked toward the glowing sun. It was only 1:03 in the afternoon and the fireball was still up there, clear as the moment of sun on the street by the deli. The moon was creeping toward it. I couldn’t help but smile as to why. I reached over to my counter, grabbed my sunglasses, and became transfixed in the event. My peripheral vision vanished. I could only see the sun in the sky and the full moon heading its way. This was the first time my sight changed. I began to see things I had only before witnessed in my dreams. I later learned that some folks get the gift of tongues and mine was the gift of sight as a would-be fly-on-the-wall. I was given a unique perspective of the *It* that created everything known and everything unknown, everything imaginable and everything unimaginable.

I have been chosen to tell the story as it was for me and will be for you. I had no idea as to why, but this is how it was . . . will be . . . went . . . began . . .