

“Through a Glass, Dimly”

I.

First, I saw nothing but darkness.

Then, a glow, or perhaps more accurately, a warmth. It was a feeling, a sensation both physical yet entirely intangible, as if a warm light were pouring over me, into me, filling me like liquid in a vessel, permeating its interior and welling up until it overflowed.

I felt loved.

I do not know how else to describe it except as being loved.

Totally.

Completely.

Unconditionally.

Despite my flaws, shortcomings, and misdoings.

I felt known, accepted, and like this life, this warmth, was there, always had been under the surface or in the back of my mind, but presently was making itself known to me directly, and radiating outward from its source, into me, and back out again. I felt understood, embraced, loved, and as if an incredibly benevolent something or someone were smiling upon me, shining with a rather ethereal, ineffable aesthetic quality not unlike that found in a rainbow, or a storm cloud in the summer that has sunshine piercing out from it after a particularly ravishing thunderstorm.

All this I felt, or saw, but as if with an *inner* eye, standing wherever I was. The invisible endearing energy radiated all about and presently became manifest as a gradually more visible wavelength, illuminating my surroundings. I appeared to be in the woods in a thicket of trees under increasingly purple and pink skies, slowly and dimly coming into focus above me.

Then, all at once, before me, I saw the face.

At first, all I saw was the face. Old as time and ancient as the earliest formations of the cosmos itself, but benevolent and incredibly young, with a youthful glint in the eyes that seemed paradoxically to contain that very cosmos, the face hovered before me. He or it or whoever or whatever beamed at me, smiling upon my pitiful countenance. His beard was like fire, swirling and crackling. His features were perfect, more beautiful, radiant, and sharper than any human's and any statue's likeness of human faces. It was somehow more perfect than the mathematical golden ratio and gazing at it scrambled my poor brain.

Gradually I noticed that the shadows wisped and swirled around him, softly forming what seemed like a cloak around his person. This beautiful being singularly exceeded every category of beauty and benevolence, or perhaps was those very categories themselves. Simply put, what stood (or hovered, flew?) before me was the most brilliant, amazing, beautiful thing I had ever seen or would ever see.

Then, I woke up.

I must have been three or four years old the first time I had that dream, but it was not the last time. Oh, no.

That dream recurred several times throughout my youth, every few years. Every time I awoke it would fade from my memory, fast. I would forget it happened. Then, when I saw the man (for lack of a better term), both young and old, wise beyond measure yet simultaneously innocent, it would all come flooding back to me. I would remember the being, his presence, love, energy, and, in awe, would be struck with an added, deep feeling of nostalgia, longing.

Each time the dream would become more vivid, more real, the man's features more distinct, sharper. It was like he was becoming less foggy, more in my world, or I in his, every new time I beheld him. I would notice this or that detail with each subsequent dream, features and elements of his face that were geometrically impossible to have in the waking world. It was as if he were from an altogether different dimension, a higher realm, for his face was indescribable and impossible to remember in those fleeting seconds after I awoke when I would remember, but no longer be able to see him in my mind's eye. Each time I awoke he would inevitably recede, fade away, much to my distress, until I would forget him entirely, along with my sense of loss in his leaving.

It was the night of my twelfth birthday when finally, I had the dream and remembered it, if not in full description, but events and rough detail *about* it, after awakening.

The man that night was so vivid, so real and distinct, as if I were finally "tuned in" to him, that it was nearly overpowering to my brain. It was so beautiful an experience I cried and sank to my knees. It was more real, more powerful than anything I had ever experienced in real life, being in the presence of this man in my dream.

Yet, the man smiled at me, lovingly and mercifully. He watched me quiver, shaking and trembling on my knees, but remained standing there steadfast, patient and kind.

"Rise, my child. You are loved. You are known." He spoke, or whispered, or telepathically told my soul in a voice that stretched beyond voices and resonated in my very being.

I rose.

I was not afraid and stopped trembling. I trusted him, that I knew, though I did not know who or what I was dealing with. Somehow, I knew that I could trust this man, this being, this *entity*, fully, that I was safe and protected before him.

He placed a hand that swirled like a cloud and emitted a bright pinwheel of colored light on my forehead.

"You are my anointed. Come to me. Seek me."

I gazed into his eyes. I looked right into the infinite, and the infinite stared right back.

"Wh-where? Where do I find you?" I stuttered.

"Seek me at the Vatican." The old man spoke, smiling.

“Let me out.”

With that, I gasped, and sat up awake in my bed, my bedclothes soaked in a cold sweat.

Father Wilson listened interestedly, patiently to my story.

I remembered everything, at least the events, sequentially, and in enough detail to recount them as a short narrative. I retold everything I could recall as elaborately and descriptively as was possible for a twelve-year-old boy to my family’s parish priest. The middle-aged man’s eyebrows lifted, arching upward at the point where I reuttered the man from my dream’s words to me. After I had finished my story, the priest fell silent and sat back, the arch of his spine resting on the wooden church pew.

I was nervous! He remained silent for some time, before he breathed a great big sigh.

Here it came. I knew it. This was the part where he would tell me it was only a dream, silly, and would chide me for watching too many movies, cartoons, television, looking at too many comic books and cramming as many ungodly, delusional ideas into my prepubescent brain as one boy could so that it affected my dreams.

But no.

What he said instead shocked me, shaking me to my core.

“My boy. You have a gift. An incredibly special one. One that only a scarce few Saints and clerics of the most intensely prayerful and holy ever reach. Your description fits those of a select few that have come before you and described such things. You must hone your gift. Do not squander what has been given to you. Cherish it. Cultivate it. And my advice to you, son: do your best to use it for good.”

When he said those words, he looked at me with direct eye contact, intensely, sternly.

I flinched.

“Okay, b-but how?”

“I don’t know. Honestly, I don’t. I am afraid this kind of thing goes beyond my meager abilities. But I know someone who might be able to help you. Embrace the monastic life, son! Take up the holy habits when you are ready and of age. I think you will find aid and solace in this.”

“Really?”

“Yes. And the sooner we investigate it, my child, the better.”

That was the day I decided I would pursue becoming a monk.