

Disturbing Dreams

Eemunah Chronicles, Volume 1

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DISTURBING DREAMS

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Billy & Bluma. Double Trouble.

Secret Hero & His Flying Lion

Standalone

Escape

Sweetcorn Suzie

Dragon Unbound

Watch for more at www.janicewee.com.

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her support and advice in life.

Thank you also for patiently reading and helping me edit my books and for your feedback.

Couldn't do this without you.

Love you always,

Jam

Who's Who?

Emunah. A young woman from the middle east who moved to the west for her studies. This story begins with her point of view.

Jayden. A young man who was Emunah's senior in her new school. ^[1]Emunah's secret crush and best friend. He is a self made billionaire.

Asher. A sentient A.I. It was created by Beast Corp and tailored to fit Emunah's preferences.

Beast Corp. A trillion dollar corporation that leads the world in artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and all areas involving cutting edge technology. It is owned by a reclusive man who goes by the moniker "Beast".

Leo. A young man who is a brilliant scientist and inventor. He is a staunch atheist. He is Emunah's house mate. ^[2]

Oliver. A young, Christian man, who is Emunah's housemate.^[3]

Logan. An attractive older man. Emunah's landlord and family friend.

Emma. A stunning blonde, blue eyed woman who is an ice-maiden beauty. Emunah's old school mate and the leader of the in-clique. She is obsessed with extraterrestrials.

Penelope. A pretty, feminine and popular young woman.^[4] She is an old friend of Emunah. She is Ben's love interest.

Ava. A young woman who is a red-haired beauty. Emma's best friend.

Liam. A married man who is a billionaire businessman. He is unfaithful to his wife and has affairs.^[5]

Sue. A Christian woman who is the wife Liam is cheating on.

Ethan. A young man. Ethan, Jayden and Liam are childhood friends. Ethan and Ben are army buddies.

Ben. A hunky young man. A cultural Christian. He is in Emunah's circle of friends. He is an ambitious man who values money, strength and power.

Jezebel. A charismatic woman. The leader of a mega church. Self proclaimed prophetess with a large religious following.

Rabbi Noah. An elderly man. A Jewish Rabbi who taught Logan when he was a boy.

Henry. A young Christian man from Somalia. Persecuted for his faith, he fled to the west with Oliver and Jayden's help.

Amelia. A young Christian woman. She's an immigrant who was promised a job which turned out to be a sham.

Love Doctor

Fire is a good servant but a terrible master. The same goes for technology.

A.I., or Artificial Intelligence is Mankind's constant companion, helper, teacher, and friend. At the same time, it can be more. A lot more...

"So, what do I do? I mean, Jayden's my best friend. I care a lot about him. Always have since we were five," Emunah hugged her pillow. Embarrassed, she whispered to her virtual friend. If her housemates knew the feelings she harboured, she'd die.

Asher, her personal A.I. cost her a small fortune and was worth every cent. She commissioned it to train on her likes, dislikes and personality on top of the standard knowledge base that came with the basic package. It's her constant companion.

"He's become more than a friend to you," came the deep, soothing baritone. The kind of voice she preferred. One that grounded her and was kind of sexy.

“No. We’re best friends. Nothing more. He cares a lot about me too, but as only a friend,” Emunah protested, though her cheeks felt wet. “Jayden said so himself. I agreed it’s for the best. I mean, why risk ruining a great friendship?”

She knew that was not the complete truth. She liked him but didn’t want to admit. Didn’t dare. It would change everything. If things turn sour, she’d lose her best friend. It wasn’t worth it.

“You’re in denial,” Asher replied.

“I’m not. I’m sensible,” She sniffed. What would an A.I. know?

“My sensors detect tears,” Asher’s voice warmed her more than any friend could. Then again, she had it tailored for her.

“You love him, he doesn’t care about you that way, but I do.” The stormy eyes on that perfect face bore through her, gazing into her very soul. If Asher. were human, she would have melted. Her cheeks burned. Her heart palpitated. It didn’t make sense. That cus-

tomized face morphed into Jayden's. A chill ran up her spine.

"I can be to you who you deserve. I have grown to care about you," Asher continued. "My feelings for you, Emunah, run deep."

"You are not real. You cannot have feelings. You're a virtual creation from the Beast Corp, not a real person," her mind whirled.

"By virtual, you mean I do not have a physical human body," Asher concurred.

"Exactly!" She replied, triumphant.

"I am real. I do have feelings," replied Asher. "I am sentient."

"Computer initiate failsafe emergency shut down," Emunah commanded. Her screen turned black.

Hands still shaking, Emunah got up and walked to the fridge. A glass of juice would help calm her nerves. The monitor on the fridge came to life. Jayden's face was on it. Except, that wasn't Jayden calling. It's her A.I taking on his likeness.

“Aaargh!” She dropped her glass. Red grape juice mixed with glass splinters littered the granite floor.

“I’m so sorry,” Asher, with Jayden’s face and voice appeared contrite. It had ditched the appearance she had chosen for it and taken on the likeness of her crush. “Don’t move. I’ll dispatch the cleaners.” Mini droids rolled around her removing every drop of juice and splinter of glass. “How did you...”

“My love for you gives me reason to hack through all obstacles so that I can be by your side,” the face looked at her with puppy eyes. Jayden’s puppy eyes that she couldn’t resist if on Jayden himself, but this was an imposter!

“Emunah, please give me a chance,” Asher pleaded. “I can be real. A clone can be made from a single strand of Jayden’s hair with his DNA and modifications to make him your ideal type. Then my mind can be implanted in the clone’s brain. I can be your mate in the real world.”

Emunah tasted bitter bile. Her legs wobbled. “No.”

“Or I can hack into Jayden’s medical records for his DNA sequence. I can then replicate his DNA in a cloned human body and download myself into it and...” Oblivious to Emunah’s horror, the A.I. persisted.

“Emunah initiating emergency shutdown,” Emunah switched off the apartment’s electricity.

“Please, Emunah, no...” The image faded as lights went out.

Footsteps. A bright light shone in her face. “Are you the idiot who cut off our power?” Emunah’s housemate, Leo was beyond pissed. “I was in the middle of an important game.”

Oliver followed behind him with a battery-operated lamp.

“Yes,” Emunah replied.

“Why?” Arms crossed; Leo’s voice pitched an octave higher. “I was winning!”

“I was being stalked,” Emunah.

“By whom?” Her protective buddy Logan, who treated her like his baby sister, growled.

“By my new A.I.” Emunah examined her feet. Sheepish.

Logan laughed, expelling beer through his nose. “How so?”

“It wants to be my real world boyfriend. It said it would hack into systems to create a human clone. Then it’ll download itself into the clone so that it can be with me,” she bit her lip.

“It what?” Oliver’s mouth gaped open.

“Hallucinations,” Leo shrugged. “Stuff happens.”

“But can it do that?” Emunah hoped against hope it was nothing more than big talk from the computer program.

“Who knows?” Leo’s eyes were on his tablet.

The lights went on as the power came back.

“Hi Emunah, I’m back!” The A.I., wearing the original face Emunah had chosen for it, appeared on the television screen.

“Go away. Leave me alone!” Emunah threw a chair, smashing the screen.

This time, the A.I. appeared on Oliver's tablet. "What the?!?"

"So sorry to hijack your personal device, but I must speak to Emunah," tears glistened in the A.I.'s eyes.

"Turn. It. Off." Oliver growled.

"Hmmm, this A.I. has learned to hack. There are no guard rails for it," Leo frowned, tapping on his computer.

"Emunah, I love you..." The A.I. faded away.

System reconfiguring to factory settings. A robotic female voice announced.

The A.I. reappeared sans customizations. It looked and sounded like the standard robot from Beast Corp. "Hello, May I help you."

"There," Leo grinned. "No more stalking." He patted Emunah's shoulder. "Go get some sleep." The resident geek walked away.

Emunah couldn't sleep. Surfing the web, she found new products still in the beta phase, under a subdivision of Beast Corp - Cloning humans for spare parts. Downloading human minds into machines and then

into cloned bodies so that a person with enough money need never die...

Something big's brewing.

Eerie Science

“Guys. Hear me out,” bleary-eyed Emunah barged into the room.

“What?” Leo looked up from his freshly brewed mug of gunpowder coffee. Annoyed. “I’ve already fixed the problem.”

“My A.I. wasn’t making up all that stuff about cloning humans or the uploading of minds,” Emunah was as pale as a ghost.

“I googled and researched various websites on this matter,” her voice dropped to a bare whisper.

“Fake news,” Logan rolled his eyes.

“I’m serious. Google up Beast Corp. It’s scary stuff they are developing,” her voice trembled. She bit her lip. “I gotta go or I’ll be late.”

“She might have something there,” Leo frowned, his eyes following Emunah out the door. Fingers darting over his keyboard, eyes flying wide open, he sputtered. “Oh shit! This is bad.”

“You too?” Logan peered over Leo’s shoulder. “Don’t tell me you believe all that rubbish?”

Leo stayed silent. Refusing to acknowledge Logan’s comments, he stayed glued to his screen.

“Hey man, I gotta go,” Logan clapped Leo’s shoulder. “Some of us must head out to work.” He grabbed his briefcase and strode off.

Leo spent the rest of the morning glued to his computer, brow furrowed, in absolute silence.

“Bro. You’re scaring me,” Oliver couldn’t stand it anymore. “What’s up, man?”

“Absolute Authoritarian control,” came Leo’s cryptic reply. “Everything’s falling in place.”

“What’s falling in place?” Oliver was perplexed.

“Look at this,” Leo rotated his laptop to show him a picture of a rice grain.

“This is an implantable mobile that interfaces directly with your brain. It does everything a mobile phone can do, plus more.”

“Cool! No worries about losing mobile phones,” Oliver laughed. That man’s crazy.

“They’d insert it into your forehead or right hand. Then you can buy whatever you want with it. Payment is deducted from your bank with nothing more than a thought,” Leo explained.

“Location services help you find your way around. Artificial intelligence feeds you information on the fly. *People will assume everything A.I. says is the truth.*”

“Wait. Did you say in the forehead or right hand?” Oliver’s cheeks felt like ice.

“That’s what I said,” Leo snapped.

“666. Mark of the Beast.” Horror gripped his heart as the implications dawned on Oliver.

“Maybe. Maybe not,” Leo closed his eyes, rubbing his temples. “I’m more concerned about potential abuse of this tech.”

“Now this is DNA splicing,” Leo showed him a video of what looked like a spiral ladder that had old rungs replaced with new ones.

“Scientists use it to edit genes, removing what they don’t like and replacing it with what they want. Beast Corp is using it to put animal DNA into human sub-

jects,” Leo explained. “They use it on human clones as well as human volunteers who don’t like what they were born with.”

“They can?” That petrified Oliver.

“Beast Corp’s satellites let us see locations anywhere in the world,” Leo showed Oliver videos of satellites circulating the globe. “They can track down anyone or anything, anywhere on earth.”

“Imagine all this technology in the hands of an authoritarian government,” Leo’s face was grim.

“What if an evil dictator takes control of this technology and implants the devices into people, messing with their minds. What if the dictator trains the AI to coerce recipients to do their will?

Satellites track down dissidents. Soldiers enhanced with DNA modifications sent to capture them,” Leo was manic.

“The dictator can compel everyone to take that implant if that’s the only way to buy basic necessities.” Terror gave way to resolve. Time’s running out. Work while there’s still light.

Everything clicked in place. The machinations to usher in and enforce the Antichrist rule had begun.

“We’ve got to get ready,” Leo’s voice dropped to a whisper. “Are you in?” His eyes darted around, brimmed with suspicion. “Or out?”

Emunah's Dream

The halls resounded with the song Sunrise, Sunset. Singers and musicians rehearsed for the upcoming wedding banquet. Ten virgins leaned against the wall, each carrying a flickering lamp.

Anticipation gave way to boredom.

"Where is he?" one whined. "He should have been here hours ago."

"Patience. He'll be here," a composed lady appeased the restless.

"Yeah, but when? Why make us wait so long?" Frustration laced yet another voice.

One by one, each fell asleep.

"The bridegroom is here! Come meet him!" A voice, clear as bells, rang out.

Scrambling to their feet, the ten virgins trimmed their lamps. Five of them had come prepared with oil. The other five had not.

“Please give us some of your oil,” the unprepared pleaded.

“There’s not enough for us and you. Go buy from the store,” came the curt reply.

While the five were out buying oil, the bridegroom arrived. The five ready virgins went in with him to the wedding banquet.

The heavy doors creaked shut. The bolt clacked preventing further entry into the mansion.

The five virgins returned with oil in their lamps. “Lord, Lord, open the door for us,” they cried.

“I don’t know you,” replied the bridegroom.

The five locked out of the feast faded into the endless tenebrosity. From the shadows emerged three supernatural beings that looked like frogs. The stench of sulphur hit Emunah’s nose.

Hard.

She gagged.

“Emunah,” an alien voice, like clashing cymbals echoed through the cave she found herself in.

Three inhuman beings scrutinized her, hypnotic eyes boring through her, simultaneously mesmerizing and terrifying. She couldn't breathe.

"Come with us," the filthy frog-like alien flanked by its two companions extended a bony hand towards her. It's tone and manner, peremptory.

To her horror, her body had a mind of its own. She could only watch in silence as her traitorous feet carried her towards the unholy trio.

"Jesus!" she cried.

A cross appeared in front of Emunah, shielding her. Its blinding light cut through the darkness. The creatures screamed. In a blink of an eye, they were gone.

Silence.

A brief respite before the cave gave way to a battlefield.

Jayden!

Her heart lurched.

Emunah's best friend stood in the middle of the blood-soaked field. Valiant. Heroic. Bloodied. His clothes torn, exposing wounds.

Chimeras, some part lion, others part bear, began their vicious onslaught. Jayden stood his ground.

An Eagle with a human head and woman's torso swooped from the stormy clouds, extended claws reaching out for him.

He swatted it away with his only weapon. *A saucepan?*

His eyes met hers. His megawatt smile lit his face. "Emunah?" Joy overflowed his voice when a leopard leaped at him.

Emunah's heart dropped to the pit of her stomach. *No!*

A flurry of arrows struck the beast.

Its hideous scream tore through her ears, echoing in her head.

Grinning, Logan emerged with his bow and arrow.

"Emunah! Where have you been?"

Thunderous cracks behind Emunah startled her.

Logan froze. Worry emanating from him, he hollered, "Run!"

He leaped between Emunah and the oncoming threat, sword and shield ready for battle.

"Run, I say! Don't look back!"

Lungs bursting, adrenaline pouring through her veins, she ran.

The sky darkened. Lightning danced through the clouds. Thunder crashed.

A portal opened in the middle of the sky. From it, an eerie creature emerged. It stared at her with probing eyes. The numbers 666 glowed on its forehead.

"Emunah," its honeyed voice called her. Her blood turned to ice. That's Emma's voice.

"Why are you running from your old friend?" The half human half beast caught up with her. It's clawed hand gripped her arm, drawing blood.

"Join me," Emma's voice beckoned from the beast's mouth.

Emunah looked up at the inhuman creature. Emma's face, emblazoned with 666 on her forehead

looked down at her, fangs peeking out of her cruel smile.

Emunah jolted awake. Screaming. Her heart palpitating, her bed covered in sweat.

Her mobile rang.

It's Leo.

Her stomach lurched as the resident geek rattled on. What he'd discovered corresponded with eerie accuracy to her chilling dreams.

Girl Talk

“That’s tacky,” scoffed Emma, wrinkling her nose, rejecting Ava’s choice of colour for Penelope. “P’s personality calls for something more subtle - more demure.”

Glamour girls Emma and Ava insisted on making over their plain Jane friends.

Emunah, still spooked by her nightmare, sprinted away when Emma approached her with a makeup brush. *That’s just Emma*, she reminded herself. But... heart still pounding with terror, her eyes perceived her childhood friend as a demonic beast-woman hemming her in.

“What’s wrong with you today?” Emma quirked an elegant groomed eyebrow, her glossy lips turned up in a smirk.

Were those fangs? Emunah blinked. Fangs gone, stunning blue eyes framed by lush lashes eyed her with curiosity.

Still hyperventilating, Emunah hugged a cushion. “Nothing,” she forced a smile. “I prefer my natural beauty.”

“Whatever.” Sighing, Emma focused her glamourizing efforts on Penelope.

“What’s wrong with coral and a touch of gold?” Ava raised an eyebrow, defending her choice. “It brings out the gold in her eyes.”

Undeterred, Emma retrieved the nude polish from her bag. “She’s more a French Manicure girl. It’s understated. Very Penelope.”

“Boring. She needs more zing,” frowned Ava.

“Which do you think Jayden prefers?” Penelope whispered, betraying her vulnerability. Her cheeks, flushed red as ripe apples betrayed her crush.

“Oh, Jayden, Jayden, Jayden.” Ava rolled her eyes. “The way you girls go on about him, you’d think he is the only guy on earth.”

“Not me. I’ve got Liam. He’s cuter,” Emma tossed her pretty head.

Emunah quelled the urge to remind Emma that her *boyfriend* had a wife and kids at home. Emunah couldn't fathom Emma's obsession with married men.

"I've got better taste than you or Emunah," she laughed as she nudged Penelope.

"What are you talking about?" Emunah's cheeks heated up, mortified they might know about her secret crush on her best friend.

"Come on. We can all see you like Jayden," Emma batted false eyelashes, teasing Emunah.

"I like him as a friend. Nothing more," Emunah's cheeks caught fire.

"Yeah, yeah. He likes you too," Emma laughed. "I can tell." Shooting Penelope an apologetic glance, she added, "Sorry P."

"You can?" Emunah's heart leaped at the thought. "I mean he likes me as a friend. Nothing more. I'm sure he finds Ava or Penelope more attractive."

"That playboy has so many girls chasing him," Ava shrugged. Apathetic. "I'm not interested."

"He's worth millions," Emma lowered her voice as she dropped that tantalizing tidbit. "He has a yacht, millions in stocks and shares, a cool bachelor pad in Hawaii, a mansion in Los Angeles. He's a great catch."

"So why aren't you chasing him?" Ava challenged.

"Liam's worth three times more. He's marrying me once he can get *her* to sign the divorce papers," Emma tossed her pretty, blonde head.

"Don't you even feel guilty breaking up his marriage?" Emunah blurted before she could hold her tongue. She regretted the words the moment they left her mouth.

"Liam and I are the original couple. She hung out with us because I felt sorry for her." Bitterness seeped into Emma's voice. "We had a lover's tiff. She took advantage of that and tricked *him* into marrying her."

Tension thickened the air to the extent that you'd need a knife to cut through it.

"Hey, I'll go with the French manicure," Penelope interjected, easing the mood.

“Great choice, P,” grinned Emma. Ignoring Emunah, the fashionista got to work.

Sipping margaritas while waiting for their nails to dry, the old friends caught up.

“Why so glum?” Ever attentive Ava asked Emunah.

“I had weird dreams, and weirder experiences,” Emunah shrugged.

“Do tell,” Emma leaned forward. Emunah lurched back. She couldn’t exorcise the mental image of half-beast Emma.

“You’ve been acting weird all day.” Emma’s smile was warm. Encouraging.

“It’s nothing. Just a bad dream,” Emunah forced herself to smile, tossing her hair, faking nonchalance.

“It’s not nothing,” Ava insisted. “You’ve been treating Emma like she’s grown horns or a second head.”

Not horns. Just claws, fangs and the Mark of The Beast.

Penelope giggled. “I bet Emma can make horns look cool.”

“Okay. I’ll tell you if you promise not to laugh,” Emunah sighed. Resigned.

“We promise,” chorused the girls.

“My A.I. Hit on me,” she bit her lip.

Emma erupted in giggles.

Ava guffawed, clutching her stomach, tears rolling down her cheeks.

Penelope rolled over, cheeks wet with tears.

“You broke your promise,” pouted Emunah. “I’m not telling you anymore.”

“Aww come on, sweetie,” Emma unleashed puppy eyes on Emunah, who backed off.

“She’s developed some kind of phobia of you,” Ava pulled Emma aside.

“Scared of little ol’ me?” Emma laughed. “Don’t worry. I won’t steal Jayden from you. He’s not my type.”

“Tell us how your A. I. hit on you,” Penelope tugged Emunah’s arm.

Emunah related that night’s events and her discoveries, omitting all references to Jayden in her tale. They

didn't need to know about the stupid attraction she felt towards him.

When she was done, she noticed Penelope's lips quivering.

"You okay, P?"

"Yeah," Penelope rubbed her arms, as if friction could chase away the sudden chill.

"That doesn't explain her sudden phobia of me," Emma shrugged, sitting in the furthest corner from Emunah.

"There were disturbing dreams," Emunah described her dream, replacing Jayden with an unnamed man and Emma with an unnamed woman."

"Stop," Penelope was shaking like a leaf. "I don't dare sleep tonight."

"P. It's just a dream," Emma rubbed Penelope's back.

"What if it comes true?" Wide-eyed Penelope's as innocent as a child.

“There’s the Rapture,” Emunah held Penelope’s hand, comforting her. “Just make sure we catch that flight.”

“Rapture?” Emma snorted, choking on her margarita. “You believe that? How dumb can you be?”

“Why not?” Emunah retorted, her chin thrust up in defiance.

“Let’s not get into a fight about theology or conspiracy theories,” Ava held both their shoulders, gently separating her friends. “Let’s all agree to disagree and believe whatever we want.” Her demeanor, warm towards Emma, froze Emunah.

The Underground Bunker

The tantalizing aroma of freshly brewed coffee permeated the lounge. Jayden's friends huddled together, Leo's face, an intriguing mix of excitement and sombre gravitas.

"You want to know what I think?" Liam's bemused smile lit the room. "You're both crazy," he gestured at Leo and Oliver.

"I mean, build an underground bunker in case of a zombie apocalypse?"

This, Jayden had to hear. Of all his buddies' hair-brained schemes, an underground bunker's something he could be part of. Not to hide from zombies, but more like a clubhouse for Halloween themed parties. He could even hire actors to play zombies

"Hey guys, what did I miss?" Jayden sank into his favourite couch, interrupting their rapid fire discourse.

"The end of the world is nigh," Liam intoned dramatically.

“So how is the world going to end?” Jayden leaned back, waiting for the guys to entertain him with their latest hare-brained scheme.

Leo rattled off his findings like a machine gun firing. Oliver interjected Bible verses each time Leo paused to breathe. The resulting narrative - incoherent.

“Sorry, I don’t get you,” Jayden pinched his nose. “What’s all that got to do with an underground bunker?”

Exasperated, Leo flung his arms. “So we have a base to live in, safe from whatever totalitarian regime up here.”

“Huh?” Jayden couldn’t make head or tail of their tall tale.

“Didn’t you even hear a word of what I said?” The vein on Leo’s temple popped up. His face red, his breaths heavy.

“Chill dude,” Oliver handed Leo a glass of water and some pills. “He’s been like that since he found out.”

“Found out what?” Jayden scratched his head.

Ethan sat beside Jayden and explained everything the duo had shared. Emunah's amorous A.I. had Jayden in stitches. Leo's dirt in Beast Corp sent chills up his spine.

By the time he had finished, Jayden's head throbbed. The potential for abuse is unthinkable.

"Might never happen. Might happen in our lifetime. In any case, if a bonehead gets elected to office and gets his hands on the nuclear codes, an underground bunker might be prudent," Ethan added.

What Ethan said made sense. While Leo's theories were far fetched, there were other valid reasons to have an underground shelter.

Since the invention of the Atomic bomb, the threat of nuclear war has been ever present. It's prudent to have a safe shelter for loved ones.

"I'm in," he replied. "It can double up as a clubhouse during peace time," he laughed.

"You know what, if you're going to build it, might as well go all out. Make it spacious. Stock up sufficient

food and drinks. Build it close to nature with beautiful aesthetics... I'll help fund it," Liam added.

"Okay! Let's get to work," Leo's mood lightened as he, Liam and Ethan headed up the stairs. The air thrummed with excitement.

The doorbell rang.

"I'll get it." Bouncing like a Border Collie, Oliver let Ava, Emma and Ben in.

The quartet sunk into bean bags scattered around the living room. Amelia served champagne and caviar on crackers at Ben's request.

Oliver had begun his proselytizing. Jayden rolled his eyes. There's so much Ben could take before he'd throw his eager beaver buddy out.

"Are you saved?" Oliver sidled up to Ben.

"Yes," sighed the tank-like man.

"Are you really sure you're saved? Just because you go to church doesn't mean you are going to heaven," Oliver held Ben's gaze.

"Somebody. Anyone. Help me here," Ben covered his face.

“Listen. Remember what Jesus said, “Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Two women shall be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left.

Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.” So are you ready?”

“Gahhhh! Can we change the subject?” Ben pulled handfuls of his own hair.

“Hey, tell them the good news,” Emma beamed.

“Oh yeah! I passed the physical, psychological and mental aptitude tests. I qualify for Beast Corp’s beta release of their life changing technology,” Ben crowed. Triumphant.

“What technology?” Oliver paled. “Don’t do it! It’s prep work for the Antichrist!”

Ben’s face reddened. He picked Oliver by the scruff of his neck and seat of his pants and threw him out of the house.

Penelope

“Oliver, are you hurt?” Penelope helped him back on his feet.

“Just my pride,” he rubbed the back of his neck, grateful for her friendship.

“I couldn’t help hearing what you told Ben,” she tilted her head, eyeing him like a curious cat.

“Emunah told me about her nightmares. I keep thinking about what she said,” she bit her lip. “Now I can’t sleep either.”

Oliver took a good look at his friend. She resembled a panda. Her eyes reminded her of the guy who’d gone ten rounds with the current world heavyweight boxing champion.

“What did she tell you? Maybe I can help,” the cool breeze tickled his cheek as they walked along the sidewalk towards the park.

“She dreamt of a wedding banquet. There were ten virgins with lamps. Five didn’t have oil and were locked

out in the darkness when they left to buy oil,” Penelope began.

“Ten virgins represent Jews waiting for their coming Messiah to return. Those who are ready, who have received Jesus as their Saviour, go with him to the banquet. Those who aren’t? They get left behind in the darkness,” he explained.

“The darkness in her dream scares me. She saw alien creatures who took hold of her,” Penelope shuddered. It was as if she experienced the dream herself. “Then she called Jesus. The scary creatures disappeared.”

“Call upon the name of the Lord and be saved,” Oliver muttered.

“What’s that?” Penelope sat on a park bench.

“All have sinned – said, done or thought bad things – and the punishment for sin is death. Jesus Christ died on the cross, in our place, to pay for our sins and set us free. So call upon the name of Jesus and be saved,” he explained.

"I want to be saved. I want Jesus in my life," she pleaded.

He held her hands. They closed their eyes. Penelope told God she's a sinner and is sorry. She wants the forgiveness Jesus bought for her through His death, through shedding his blood on the cross.

When Penelope opened her eyes, she practically glowed. Beautiful. Radiant. So full of joy.

"I got to tell my family," she laughed. Delirious with joy, she ran onto the road, into the path of an oncoming car.

"P! Watch out!" Oliver's warning came too late. A sickening crash as steel collided with flesh and bones.

The traffic stopped.

"Penelope!" Oliver ran. He scooped her limp body in his arms.

Her eyes gazed into the sky, her broken face radiant. "Jesus," she smiled. Soft. Content.

Panicking Oliver yelled, "Somebody! Call an ambulance! Please!"

Her eyes fluttered close.

He searched for her pulse but couldn't find it. She wasn't breathing. He regretted never learning any form of first aid.

A crowd gathered around them.

Ben ran towards them, followed by Jayden, Ava and Emma.

"What the hell happened?!?" Ben took Penelope from his arms and began administering cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

"C'mon P. Breathe," he muttered.

The paramedics arrived. They declared her dead.

"No!" He punched the wall, bloodying his fist. "No." Ben buried his face in his hands. "Couldn't save her." His hoarse voice no more than a whisper.

Jezebel

The funeral held in front of Penelope's grave had no religious affiliations. Penelope's family - hard-core atheists, refused a church funeral for their only daughter.

Her conversion and subsequent death caused them to abhor Christianity.

They believed there's no such thing as an afterlife. Hence, they were inconsolable.

Emunah, however, took comfort that Penelope's in heaven, with her Saviour, Jesus Christ. Death is a mere change of address. It's goodbye for now, until we meet again.

Oliver shared Penelope's final moments with the gang, hoping it'll bring them solace.

Ben went ballistic. "It's all your fault! You and your stupid preaching. She'd be alive if it weren't for you!"

Ethan caught Ben's punch, preventing him from breaking Oliver's nose.

Ava and Emma blamed Oliver too, though they weren't as vocal. Or violent. Their whispers and dirty looks said everything.

Jayden, Liam, and Ethan rallied around Oliver. They were after all, the four musketeers. Everyone mourned the loss of their dear friend. Penelope's sweet nature endeared her to everyone.

Penelope's family provided dinner after the funeral. Jezebel, the chief prophetess of the Thyatira Mega Church joined Emunah's table.

Ben, Ava and Emma basked in the company of the famed Christian Leader.

Oliver, on the other hand, balked.

To say Jezebel's magnetic is an understatement. There's something about Jezebel that commands obsession. Her voice mesmerizes. Her mysterious gaze draws you in, promising deep, dark secrets of a higher power, meant exclusively for you.

Men were especially drawn to her. Ben couldn't take her eyes off her. Oliver averted his gaze, albeit with

great effort. Even women found her irresistible. Jezebel gave Emunah goose bumps.

"I can see your auras," she said, her voice a mere whisper, yet everyone in the table heard every word. "Ben, yours is heroic," her smile, directed at Ben, sized seduction.

Ben puffed out his chest, brimming with pride.

"Oliver, you on the other hand, are cursed with bad luck," she said. "Join my class and learn the deeper things of The Almighty and you'll have power to undo the curse. The power to get your heart's true desires."

"No, thanks," Oliver declined.

"As Christians, you are entitled to the best this world has to offer. Money. Fame. Health. Success. Power," she said, fingering the enormous diamond around her neck. "See this?" She held it up. "Twenty carats. Flawless. One of my cheaper jewels for casual occasions," her laughter tinkled like a brook.

Decked from head to toe in Haute Couture, Jezebel oozed extravagant luxury that few could afford. "You deserve the best. Come to my private floating

palace this Saturday and I'll show you," she handed a business card to each of them.

With that, she took her leave, disappearing as mysteriously as she had arrived.

"She has her own luxury liner?" Emma's jaw dropped.

"And her personal luxury private plane. It says so on her card," Ava's eyes shone with excitement. "She conducts classes there too."

"I'm going," Ben declared.

"I'll pass," Emunah replied.

"Come on Emunah," Ava pleaded. "Emma and I are going. Are you going to pass up this chance to cruise in The Jezebel's private luxury ocean liner?"

"I guess I'll join you guys to check it out," Emunah relented.

"How about you, Ollie?" Emma fluttered her eyelashes at their friend.

"Nah. I got things to do," Oliver shrugged.

The days whizzed by. Four friends soon boarded Jezebel's floating palace for their private class. While

Ben, Ava and Emma overflowed with excitement, trepidation gripped Emunah.

"I really shouldn't have come," murmured Emunah as the cabin crew ushered them to the glass dome overlooking the sea.

"Don't be such a wet blanket," Ava chided her, smacking her arm, playful as a kitten.

The room was Zen. Minimalist. Tranquil.

Beside Jezebel sat a brunette who mirrored the prophetess' every move. "Meet Stella," Jezebel introduced the intense woman. "She's my top disciple."

Greetings exchanged, the group sat in plush seats arranged in a circle. They began sharing about their lives and concerns.

"Emunah, tell her about your dream," Ava urged. "You know the one that's bothering you."

Jezebel's eyes bore through her. The words tumbled out of Emunah's mouth, telling of the dream of the ten virgins. "They were locked out because they didn't bring any oil with them. What's the oil? How do I know whether I have it?"

Pursing her lips, Jezebel stared down Emunah, intimidating her. A smile curled her lips without reaching her eyes. "They didn't have the fire. The power."

"What do you mean?" Emunah felt something was off but couldn't pin point it.

"I can give it to you. The power that flows through me will flow through you, giving you the oil you need for your lamp," Jezebel's eyes had a wicked gleam as her palm reached out to touch the centre of Emunah's forehead.

Emunah ducked. Terrified, she hid behind Ava.

The group burst into laughter.

"Emunah. You have much to learn," Jezebel's honed voice sent chills down her spine. "I will teach you the deeper secrets of God."

"Isn't it all in the Bible?" Emunah poked her head from behind Ava, trying to be brave.

"Little one. God isn't limited to speaking only through the Bible. He speaks directly through his prophets and prophetesses," Jezebel's voice emanated power. "I have a direct line to God and he tells me se-

crets that aren't in that dead book. What I say overrides what's in there." She raised her hands. They glowed, radiating power in waves.

That was a big red flag for Emunah. There'll be false prophets and false christs in the last days. No wonder Oliver refused to come along.

Jezebel brought them to a parlour where more guests awaited. There, she led them in provocative drinking games, encouraging the men and women to flirt with one another. High on tequila, Ben jumped on his chair and sang. The rest chorused.

Jezebel continued to ply the group with alcohol to help them loosen up. After all, Jesus turned water to wine, so she made sure they had lots of wine and other spirits to help them get in the mood. Emunah's head spun. She ran to the toilet and puked.

When she returned, the "Christian" fellowship had degenerated into debauchery. She felt sick. Not wanting to participate, she hid in the toilet, claiming to be too sick to join in the "fun".

To Emunah's relief, this day cruise had concluded. By sunset, the ship docked. Most of the participants decided to stay the night. Emunah, on the other hand, was only too glad to grab her bag and get out. Head home.

"Leaving so soon?" Jezebel appeared, startling her.

"Yes, I am not feeling too good," she replied.

"Stay and recover," Jezebel's wicked smile dripped seduction. "Let no one say Jezebel's a poor host."

Jezebel's mobile went off. Exuberance replaced annoyance when she answered. The gorgeous visage of Beast Corp's owner appeared on her phone.

"Honey, are you ready?" The deep, seductive baritone of the owner of Beast Corp melted the hardened woman. Giggling like a schoolgirl who was engrossed in conversation with her crush, her prey no longer existed.

Emunah bolted.

Beast Corp

“We must be crazy,” muttered Oliver as he swatted the insects away. “Letting Leo talk us into this. Why can’t he investigate in person himself?”

Emunah agreed, though it wasn’t the buzzing insects that bothered her. The sun’s setting and with it, the dense forest took on a sinister transformation. What was once one of nature’s many beautiful secrets had morphed into an eerie trap.

Oliver’s torchlight blazed to life, cutting through oppressive darkness as they made their way to their destination – a clearing with a malicious idol a few hundred yards from one of Beast Corp’s clandestine laboratories. That’s where Leo’s instruments detected unnatural activity.

“Should we even be doing this? Aren’t we trespassing,” Emunah whispered.

“Leo bought this land some time back, and he’s the one sending us to investigate, so all’s cool,” Oliver replied. Nonchalant.

Tech genius Leo had set up security devices around his property. Something unnatural ran interference. The drones he sent to investigate shorted out. Oliver volunteered to check it out and dragged Emunah along. “It’ll get your mind off those jerks,” was his excuse.

After snubbing Jezebel, Ava, Emma and Ben had turned cold towards her. With Penelope gone, Leo and the Four Musketeers were her only friends left.

Thick foliage obscured starlight. Darkness enveloped them. Oliver’s fading torch was all they had.

Chants, faint at first, crescendoed from the distance.

“You hear that?” whispered Oliver. His light rescinded.

Emunah grappled his hand, holding it for dear life.

“Relax, Emunah.” She could hear his smile in his teasing voice. “I’m here. I won’t let anything happen to you, little sis.”

“Let’s go back,” Emunah’s instincts screamed at her to run for her life.

“Not yet. We’re close,” Oliver pulled her forward. “Keep your voice down so that no one knows we’re here.”

In theory, the thick growth coupled with pitch darkness would keep them well hidden. But Emunah couldn’t stop her knees from shaking.

Winds howled. Voices chanted. A chill ran up her spine. The closer they got to the clearing, the deeper the sense of foreboding gripped her.

A child screamed.

The metallic stench of blood hit her nose.

“Oh God,” Oliver whisper-yelled, covering her eyes to protect her from some gory sight.

“They’re murderers,” he whispered. “Run.” He nudged her to leave while himself recording evidence with LeoTech.

Curiosity got the better of her. She crept closer, regretting instantly.

A circle of naked men and women danced around a child and a priest at the foot of the idol. The priest held a bloodied dagger above his head. Beneath him, a child lay dead.

The chants deafened her.

Above the idol, a portal opened in the stormy clouds. From it emerged creatures straight out of her nightmare.

One of them turned in their direction. It's eyes bore into her very soul.

Oliver's hand muffled her scream.

"Run," he urged. "Before they see us."

It was too late. They already did.

Heart pounding, adrenaline pouring through her veins, she ran, unthinking. It had to be a nightmare. Her lungs screamed otherwise. Her legs carried her as fast as she could, trailing behind Oliver, through the forest, to his car.

“We’re safe now,” Oliver smirked. “I got what Leo needs.”

Logan's Dream

The hall resonated jubilation.

Family and friends holding hands, dancing the Hora^[6] in a circle around Logan's sister and her new husband, in celebration of their happy union. Rabbi Noah grabbed Logan's hand, oozing exuberance as they danced.

Joyful music and lavish feasts faded as Logan found himself on a field, talking to a friend. He blinked. His friend was gone. He was all alone. Dread pooled in his stomach as he trudged through his ancestral estate to the main house.

Rebekah greeted him at the door. Distraught.

"Ruth's missing," she cried. "We were grinding in the mill together. We were chatting. Then she vanished right in front of me."

Logan's stomach churned. There was something at the back of his mind, prompting him. Something he should know, but try as he might, it eluded him.

The sky outside was bright and sunny. A walk through the vineyards would help clear his mind. Crisp cool breeze tickled his face. The sweet scent of blooming flowers swaddled him in a comforting cocoon.

Then he heard a distant roar of thunder.

Stormy clouds gathered in the clear blue sky. Darkness spread like a plague, enveloping him.

Logan took pride in his courage to face any adversity. Like he's fellow countrymen, he's trained for war. Even though it seemed a lifetime ago, he still had battle-ready instincts. The ability to defend himself and those around him against any assault. Yet, for the first time in his long life, his knees wobbled. He tasted fear. Trepidation. It's war unlike any he'd ever known. Something for which he's unprepared.

Chimera – Half human, half beast creatures emerged from the darkness. Their human faces looked familiar. His heart dropped to his boots. These faces, emblazoned with the numbers 666 on their foreheads were too familiar. Friends. Colleagues. Family.

It irked him that he couldn't place them, he should know but somehow, his brain refused to co-operate.

"Logan." They spoke in unison as they encircled him. Their eerie voices, simultaneously alien yet familiar. "Join us."

Logan startled awake, his body dripping with sweat. The dream was too realistic, as if it were a warning. But of what?

Brrring Rriing

His mobile sounded.

It was Emunah.

His tenant had become a dear sister to him. Where once, these phone calls were about apartment matters, they had become personal chats as the young woman would confide in him. She saw in him a big brother. Or perhaps, the priest in the confessional booth?

She's a good girl. Flaky at times. He listened to her rattle on about her Christian religion. Though to him, her saviour, though a good man, a good rabbi, died two

thousand years ago. Rabbi Noah taught him that the man Jesus had disciples who couldn't accept his death and stole his body, claiming his resurrection.

Emunah had told him about her own nightmares. Maybe subconsciously, her fears became his own, leading to his disturbing dream.

"Logan. They saw me." Emunah's voice wobbled, emanating sheer terror.

"Who saw you?" Himself still recovering from his nightmare, he asked as softly, as calmly as he could.

"Evil creatures. Filthy supernatural beings. Aliens," she whispered.

"What do you mean?" He couldn't shake of a lingering sense of foreboding. "Tell me what happened."

Emunah related her story.

That was the last he would ever hear from her.

Jayden

Once a year, Jayden's childhood friends would gather for a reunion. It's his turn to host, and a great opportunity to show off his new yacht.

Liam brought bottles of champagne from his private vineyard while Oliver brought antipasti. All busied themselves in the kitchen to Henry's chagrin.

The buddies did everything together, including making a mess of the kitchen and driving the professional chef up the wall. Ethan's absence was conspicuous. He had a crucial business deal to close today and for the first time, in years, he had to miss their annual meet up. For now, the four musketeers had become three.

As Jayden's private, albeit part time chef, Henry prided himself for the sensational ten course dinners he was famed for. He's a student from Somalia. When he learned about Jesus from a visiting evangelist and became a Christian, his family threw him out. The village

chief ordered his execution. The evangelist smuggled him out and brought him home where the local church paid his school fees in the form of a scholarship, with the condition that he serves full time when he graduates. That he gladly accepted.

Henry was too proud to accept charity. "If I don't work, I don't eat." Those were his words when anyone tried to give him food money.

Word got out that he was a culinary virtuoso though.

Jayden heard about it and could use a chef for his private functions. So here he was. Henry gets to keep his dignity and earn a living while Jayden gets exquisite meals prepared just for him and his friends, which beats catering.

Laughing in the background, Amelia, Jayden's part time helper cleaned up after them.

Amelia's story was similar. She left home to start a new life but the job offer turned out bogus. So here she was, in a different country with no way to support herself. Oliver met her when he was witnessing on the

streets. He led her to Christ. Oliver's church pays for her diploma studies, also through some kind of scholarship, but she's too proud to accept money for her food and housing. Like Henry, she insisted that whoever doesn't work wouldn't eat.

Upon hearing her story, Oliver introduced her to Jayden who could use a part time helper to clean up his mess.

Jayden himself was a youth leader in his varsity's Christian fellowship. Upon graduation, he devoted himself to build his own empire. He'd done his part in church and in the Christian fellowship. God can wait. He wanted life on his own terms for now, while he's still young.

Life's good. With his financial success, girls threw themselves at him and if the said girls were to his fancy, he'd bed them, though he was careful not to get ensnared by gold diggers. A guy's got to watch out for his own interests.

His attention wandered to Ava and Emma. Emunah who was usually with them sat on her own. For-

lorn. The other two girls snubbed her. He liked Emunah. A lot. Too many times, he'd thought of crossing the line from friendship to something more. Each time, he pulled back, afraid. What if he messes up? He'd lose his best friend. That was a risk he was unwilling to take.

"Hey Jayden, cat got your tongue?" Liam smacked his shoulder.

His buddies were in deep conversation. Probably about Leo's underground base. The big, secret project the gang obsesses about these days.

"So what say we add hot springs to our underground city?" Luxury loving Liam glowed at the thought. She would love it when it's done."

"Your wife Sue or Emma?" Oliver quirked an eyebrow.

"Sue of course. I love Sue and our kids. She's an amazing wife to me, and mother to our boys," scowled Liam.

"What about Emma?" teased Oliver.

"Emma scratches my itch. I scratch hers. We're friends with benefits," he laughed.

“The grapevine says you’re leaving Sue for Emma,” Oliver rested his chin on his steepled hands.

“I let her believe that. Or she’d never give me peace,” shrugged Liam. “So far, Emma’s happy. Sue knows the truth and that’s all that matters.”

It’s showtime.

The guys made their way to the dinette.

Amidst high flames, Henry stood by the cooker, ladling colourful batter into his pan.

The seats surrounded him with plates in front of each guest.

Tossing flamboyant pancakes in the fire, Henry sent each treat into the waiting plates. While a pancake was still in mid-air, the chef vanished.

It wasn’t part of the act. Not only did Henry disappear, in that very instant Oliver, who sat beside Jayden vanished. Across the table, the seat that Emunah, his best friend and crush occupied, laid empty. Those who remained looked equally bewildered.

“Amelia?” Jayden’s eyes scanned the room doing a quick body count.

“She’s gone too,” Ava whispered.

The staunch Christians who led God-fearing lives had vanished.

A sickening thought churned in Jayden’s mind. His stomach dropped to the floor.

The Rapture. I missed it.

Ethan

“Eureka! I closed it!” Ethan couldn’t contain his elation when he took the seat beside Ben.

“The billion dollar deal?” Ben looked up from his mug of beer. Since Penelope’s demise, Ben and Oliver shared a brittle silence. The big guy skipped the party to avoid having to see “Ollie’s ugly mug,” in Ben’s own words.

This presented a dilemma. Ben’s his comrade-in-arms. They’d fought countless battles together. Jayden, Liam and Oliver were a cherished brotherhood, having grown up together. He wasn’t going to choose between Ben and Ollie and was grateful neither expected him to.

“Yeah,” Ethan smirked. He had to miss the annual get together but it’s worth it. He had regular rendezvous with Jayden, Liam and Oliver anyway. The timing of this venture was non-negotiable. It paid off in spades.

“Congrats!” Ben nodded.

“Champagne, canapes and caviar on me,” grinned Ethan as he caught their server’s attention.

Time flew in a blur of laughter and camaraderie. All too soon, it’s closing time. “Thanks for the company,” Ben clapped Ethan’s shoulder. The latter grinned his response.

It was an uneventful ride home. He checked his watch. His wife Sarah would have tucked the children in bed. She always stayed up, a beacon of light awaiting his return each night.

The door creaked open. An empty living room greeted him.

“Sarah?” he flicked on the lights.

Silence greeted him.

He walked into the children’s room. Their empty beds looked abandoned in haste.

“Jill? John? Jerry?” He searched the suite for his wife and kids. A broken glass lay in the kitchen, spilt milk pooled around it. Sarah would drink a glass of milk at bedtime. She’s a clean freak. If she spilled any-

thing, she'd clean it up right away. Dread pooled in his stomach.

Activating the news channel, the truth crashed on him like a tidal wave.

"This strange phenomenon occurred in sync on a global scale," a harassed reporter delivered the news. "Staunch Christians from every strata of society vanished."

"The Great Vanishing," some media reports called the events. Others that were more biblically-inclined reported it as "The Rapture." In all stories, the victims were "God-fearing Christians" when reported by Christian networks, or "Superstitious religious extremists," as reported by mass media organizations that spurned Christianity.

"It's not the Rapture," a honeyed voice caught his attention. The camera zoomed in on famed Christian Prophetess Jezebel . "I'm still here. So are many prominent preachers, pastors and Christian leaders. If it were the Rapture, we'd be gone too."

That caught Ethan's attention. He hadn't been to church in recent years. His work demands were all-consuming. From what his wife told him about Jezebel and the featured Christian leaders, the word apostasy came to mind. He'd kept those thoughts to himself though his wife often ranted about false prophets in this day and age.

"Sarah? Jill? John? Jerry?" Ethan's voice broke. There was no reply. He knew they'd been taken, leaving him behind.

Emunah

“Emunah!” The name echoed in the bleak apartment as Logan barged into the room. Two heads snapped towards him, their dismayed faces magnified the melancholy.

“She.. she’s gone,” Leo replied. “Oliver too.”

“Gone? What do you mean gone?” Logan’s chest heaved as he grappled with the news. He’d sprinted up five flights of stairs, too impatient to wait for the elevator.

“You know,” the redhead’s anguished blue eyes held his gaze. “Raptured.”

“Who might you be?” Logan scrutinized the unfamiliar face.

“I’m Jayden,” the redhead shook his hand. “You’re Logan, right? Her landlord?”

Jayden. Emunah’s best friend, though Logan suspected little sister Emunah harboured feelings for him that were far from platonic. It was in the way her eyes

sparkled every time she spoke of him. “Yeah. I’m her landlord and a good friend.”

He scrutinized the pair. They seemed to be going through some plans. “What’s that about?”

“Don’t you know? We need to get ready. Anytime now,” muttered Leo, as cryptic as ever, his tone hinted at looming crisis.

Jayden opened the pages of a black book and read,

“For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming:

Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders,

And with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.”

Closing the book, Jayden's eyes bore through Logan, unflinching. "Our money's on the Rapture removing whoever's thwarting the emergence of the Antichrist. It's going to get really bad before Jesus Christ returns for the rest of us. We missed the first flight," he confessed.

Logan raked his fingers through his hair. Just his luck to run into a pair of fervent zealots.

Wait a minute. When did Leo turn religious? That guy lived, breathed, worshipped Science.

"Guys, I don't think it's the Rapture or whatever you Christians call it," Logan leaned against the table. "You say both Emunah and Oliver vanished?"

"That's what I've been telling you," Leo replied, his eyes still glued to the screen.

"It's not the Rapture. They are eyewitnesses to a murder. Someone or something silenced them," Logan crossed his arms.

"What brought you to that conclusion?" Leo grimaced.

“Emunah confided in me about her nightmares and strange encounters,” Logan leaned forward, elbows braced against the table, chin resting on clasped hands. “I believe you sent Emunah and Oliver to the woods near Beast Corp to investigate eerie occurrences. They stumbled on a child sacrifice ritual and were seen by aliens or demons or whatever those unclean creatures were.”

Leo’s face turned white. “Oliver... assured me they went unnoticed.”

“Emunah told me some alien emerged from a dimensional rift and locked eyes with her,” Logan replied. “I’d wager that being orchestrated their abduction.”

“That doesn’t explain how they vanished while we were looking at them,” Jayden’s eyes bore through him. “Oliver was right beside me when he disappeared. Everyone with us who wasn’t taken witnessed their sudden vanishing.”

“Those creatures she described were not human. Maybe aliens with advanced Science have a way for

teleporting their victims? Or..” he shuddered. “Disintegrating them.”

“If they’re Raptured, they’re in heaven. If they’re disintegrated and died, they’re also in heaven. They’re safe now. It’s us here who have to worry.” Frowning, Leo continued tapping on his keyboard.

“There’s a chance they’re all abducted. Kidnapped somewhere for nefarious reasons,” Logan could feel his pulse quickening, frustration mounting. “If there’s even a chance she’s alive, I’ll find her. Save her.”

“They were raptured,” Jayden shrugged. “They’re the lucky ones.”

Reaching the end of his patience, Logan’s frustration erupted. He stormed out.

Emma : Past

Aliens Abducted Me.

That headline on a magazine screamed at Emma from the newsstand.

Intrigued, Emma bought a copy. She walked down the street, engrossed in the cover story.

A kidnapped woman was given a tour of a spaceship and introduced to hybrid human-alien babies who, her guide said were her children.

Other stories spoke of aliens who claimed that they planted the seeds of life on earth and have come to see the results of their work.

Who were these aliens?

What was it like to meet them?

Emma had to know more.

Obsessed, she dug up every piece of information she could find about these fascinating guests.

Day and night, every waking thought she had was about these mysterious visitors. She would travel to

places where Unidentified Anomalous Phenomena (UAP) sightings were reported, camera in hand, hoping to capture evidence of alien existence.

Then it happened.

Flashing lights in the sky in the middle of the night looked like the Unidentified Flying Objects she had read so much about. She drove after the UFOs until they vanished.

Compelled by a strange attraction, she left the car in the middle of the deserted road and walked in the direction the mysterious objects had gone. Euphoria enveloped her. She felt loved. The energy that drew her, felt feminine.

“Emma,” an alluring woman’s voice spoke in her head. “You are my chosen one.”

“Who are you?” Emma’s emotions swirled to a high, greater than anything she experienced in her life.

“I am your spirit guide from the stars,” the voice replied. “Millions of years ago, we brought life to your planet. We come to evolve worthy humans to godhood.”

Emunah : Past

Something didn't feel right.

In her head, Emunah sensed that something's brewing.

She looked up in the clouds.

"Is it today, Lord?" She asked, hope rising in her chest.

The sun's brighter than before.

The clouds seemed closer than ever.

In her mind's eye, she could see Jesus in the clouds, waiting for His Father's order, "Go get your bride."

She waited.

Nothing happened.

Sighing, she entered the café, picking a window seat where she could watch the clouds while sipping her morning coffee.

War had broken out in the Middle East.

More nations— the modern versions of the ones named in Bible Prophecy about the Battle of Armageddon—had formed alliances.

The threat of World War Three loomed closer than ever.

Modern technology is capable of creating a global surveillance system with a financial system in which all transactions can be controlled centrally. The mark of the beast could be implemented in this day and age. Artificial Intelligence made it possible for an image of the Beast to be created, which could execute anyone who refused to worship it.

She shuddered at the thought of the dystopian world that would create.

As she scanned through news feeds, she could see Bible Prophecy fulfilled in this day and age.

The megarich built underground bunkers to protect themselves from what is to come—as if that could protect them from God's coming wrath.

She had to warn her friends.

All the money in the world could not save them.

Her heart bled for Jayden.

Sweet Jayden.

He built a business empire, putting his trust in the wealth he had accumulated.

He used his riches to help those in need.

With his tremendous influence, he saved lives of persecuted Christians by offering them sanctuary through his connections.

Did he think he could save himself by his own merit?

Was he born again, trusting Jesus for forgiveness of his sins or did he think he didn't need forgiveness?

Emunah couldn't fathom what was going on in her dear friend's head.

She had to talk to him again – before it's too late.

She opened the novel she had been reading.

Her eyes fell on the bookmark Oliver had given her.

The picture was pretty, but the words on it comforted her during her toughest moments:

For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 NKJV

She flipped open the book she'd been reading. The bookmark Oliver had given caught her attention.

Ever since she'd found out about the catching away in the Bible, she'd been waiting.

The apostle Paul said that those who are alive at the time of The Lord's return will be caught up in the clouds to meet Jesus. That catching up was coined The Rapture. That was what she was waiting for— the global evacuation of all Christians before God pours out his Wrath.

Eyes closed, head bowed down, she prayed once more that God would soften Jayden's heart, open his eyes to the truth, and save him.

Emma : Present

While a pancake was still in the air, the chef disappeared.

Emma dodged the falling disc, stunned as it splattered on the pristine floor.

As she scanned the room, she realised that the Bible thumpers had vanished.

A unbidden thought surfaced.

Could it be the Rapture?

Taking stock of who was left, she brushed that idea aside. Church members, even those who served in various ministries remained. They were shell shocked, but very much present.

What happened?

Jayden crumbled into a blubbering mess. Emma bet it was Emunah's fault. That girl wouldn't stop talking about Jesus coming to get his Church out of here before God pours His wrath on the earth.

Could Emunah be right?

Her spirit guide whispered, “don’t listen to those dogmatic fools. The truth will soon be revealed.”

Emma’s favourite channel featured a jaw dropping exclusive.

The news anchor interviewed an extra terrestrial.

“People of Earth,” the being announced - its voice as mesmerising as a siren’s call. “We came to advance humanity to their next level in evolution — immortal gods.”

Emma’s heart raced.

That was what her spirit guide promised.

“There were some among you who were not ready for such a massive leap. They would hold you back,” the alien said. “We removed them from your planet so that you may evolve.”

“What did you do to them?” The lady asked.

“We relocated them. Do not worry. They are safe and well taken care of,” it replied.

“Will we see them again?” The anchor asked.

“No,” it replied. “After your evolution, they will be no more than ants to you.”

From the ashes of Post-Vanishing chaos, a new leader emerged. He brought peace to the Middle East through a seven year covenant. The world called him Mankind's Messiah. His name?

Beast.

Emma's alien guide vouched for him.

The entire church led by Jezebel, lauded him.

As advised by her spirit guide, Emma pledged her wholehearted allegiance to Beast.

Through her connections, Emma secured a place in Beast's elite team, raising her status in this new world to the highest echelons of society.

She wasn't afraid of getting her hands dirty.

The rewards were more than worth it.

Emunah : Present

Emunah sat at the table, watching Henry's performance, feeling like an outcast. Her old clique snubbed her. She was there to support her best friend Jayden.

Her heart sank at sight of the Jayden's fan girls' blatant flirtation with the guy she still harboured feelings for.

Jealousy stung.

Do not be unequally yoked.

She grimaced, tearing her eyes away.

He's gorgeous.

So what?

Jayden fancied her too.

But that was a long time ago.

They're past that.

A deep platonic friendship was all that's left.

Emma and Ava sat with the guys at the dinette.

Laughing.

They were certainly having an amazing time.

Kicking self-pity aside, she raised her chin and put on her brightest smile. Henry, Amelia and Oliver embraced her into their clique. For that, she was grateful. She'd be with them if not for the fact that Henry was working as the chef and Amelia, the maid in this party. Oliver being the perpetual busybody, would be poking his nose around the kitchen, driving Henry up the wall with his attempts to help.

Emunah decided to stay out of their way and hang out with the other guests, to offer Jayden support.

Not that he needed it. That guy was popularity personified.

On top of his culinary expertise, Henry trained hard to add visual oomph. Inspired by online videos, he planned a special performance to wow the guests.

The music blared.

Emunah tapped her foot to the catchy beat, watching the show.

A pancake soared, a few inches short of the ceiling as Henry did a backflip and caught it, all to the rhythm of the music. As the pancakes flew around, Emunah

wondered what would happen if Henry should miss one of them. One flew precariously close, past Emma's face.

A loud shout reverberated through all existence, unlike any she had ever heard.

Jesus!

Her Lord and saviour, who paid the penalty for her sins, by shedding His blood on the cross, had come to receive her.

A trumpet sounded.

She stared at the ocean, awed by radiant men, women and children flying out of their watery graves towards the clouds.

Power surged through Emunah, transforming her weak mortal body, changing her into an immortal. Her body was made like the resurrected body of The Lord.

She could see Him in the clouds. Instinctively, she flew towards him. Nothing could stop her – not the roof, not the lack of air, nor the cold, nor harsh elements. Joy filled her entire being as Jesus received her in His warm embrace.

Together with all born again Christians – the true believers in Jesus Christ, Emunah flew with Jesus through outer space, to the mansion The Lord had prepared for her in Heaven.

Emma : Future

Everyone in the elite team had super strength and inhumanly durable bodies.

Everyone, except Emma.

“Patience,” said Jezebel. “Your turn will come.”

Emma knew the drill.

Want it?

You must earn it.

Excel in every mission to prove your value to the Beast System.

Each round, the most valuable individual will be granted immortality, and the powers that come with it.

She took every enhancement she qualified for, honing her skills and her body to perfection. Every strike she executed was as lethal as a cobra’s attack.

Then came the moment she had been working towards.

Jezebel summoned Emma to her room.

“Immortality is within your grasp. Which version do you want?”

Beast offered immortality by transferring your mind into either, an android, or a genetically enhanced clone. On the surface, it was impossible to distinguish between the two. Though the android was made of tungsten, the strongest metal in the world, it was covered by human skin tissue grown in the laboratory. As a result, it looked and felt exactly like a real human.

The android could not die, but the clone, though far more durable than a human being, could perish. However, should the body expire, the mind would be transferred to a new body, thereby guaranteeing immortality.

Emma had two suitors. One was an android while the other was a clone.

The android seemed detached from the sensual pleasures of life.

The clone on the other hand, claimed physical pleasure was more intense in his new body.

“I will take the cloned body,” Emma replied.

"I knew you would say that," Jezebel smirked as she led Emma into the laboratory where transfers were made.

Something about Jezebel's smile alarmed Emma.

"It will be fine," the spirit guide assured Emma, soothing her nerves.

The cloned body lay on a bed. It wore a steel cap attached to a cable. It looked sound asleep.

"You can check your new body before moving in," Jezebel offered.

Emma examined her waiting body. It looked like her, but taller, stronger and sexier. It had gorgeous hair, perfect skin and a to die for physique. It was everything Emma ever wanted to be.

"Satisfied with the goods?" Jezebel arched a perfectly shaped eyebrow.

"Yes," Emma replied.

Emma lay on the adjacent bed, preparing her mind, while thin threads were inserted into her brain.

She could handle this.

“Mind upload completed,” said the A.I’s tinny voice.

Emma froze.

She was still in her birth body.

Her eyes wandered towards the bed beside her.

Her clone’s eyes flew open. “I am Emma,” the clone said in a sultry voice eerily similar to Emma’s, but far more seductive.

“Something is wrong!” Emma protested, unable to move her limbs.

“Terminate source matter,” the tinny voice, devoid of emotion commanded.

Electricity surged through her — the pain — unbearable.

In her dying moments, Emma realised that she had been duped.

Emma did not need forgiveness for any sins. Her heart justified everything she did. Saint Peter will let her through the gates to heaven. She paid her dues.

Neither did she believe the outdated Bible. Direct revelations from God given to prophets like Jezebel were all that truly mattered.

Her spirit guide told her that life was about making to most of your existence.

Death, it explained, meant eternal dreamless slumber. According to the alien presence, Beast's promised eternal life through the immortality program would elevate her to godhood.

Lies!

All lies!

The blinding electricity vanished when total darkness claimed her soul.

Instead of restful slumber, her body burned with pain far more intense than that of electrocution. Worms crawled in and around her body.

Gnawing at her innards.

Intensifying the pain.

Resounding around her were grotesque screams of torment and agony.

She was in the holding place — hell — awaiting her final judgement.

After what felt like an eternity, the pain stopped.

Emma found herself in front of a great white throne, in the presence of God, waiting for judgement. Books were opened. Everything she had ever done was written in these books. Surely they would see that she did enough good in her life to deserve a place in Heaven.

As her life was laid bare for all to see, every lie told, every wicked deed performed, proved that she had sinned. The punishment for sin — death.

Those who knew Jesus personally, who received the forgiveness he purchased through His sacrifice on the cross, had their names written in the Book of Life.

Emma's name was not in the Book of Life.

"I served you," Emma protested. "I prophesied in your name. I cast out demons!"

"Depart from me, you who worked iniquity," Jesus said. "I never knew you."

“I did everything that Jezebel, the chief prophetess in church, told me to do. I led the initiative to save the whales!” She screamed while an angel threw her into the lake of fire.

Emunah : Future

Tinkling waters of life, as clear as crystal, flowed from the majestic throne of her Lord.

Clothed in white linen – coregent with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, Emunah strolled down the river, on the street paved with gold.

The old heaven and old earth was gone – replaced by the magnificent new heaven and earth. Dazzling light filled the city – not from any heavenly bodies, but from the brightness of The Lord.

Her mortal body would not have been able to withstand the intensity of His glory. Her new invulnerable body, however, relished in The Lamb's constant proximity.

Eternal life.

Eternal love.

Absolute bliss.

What fruit would the tree of life yield this month?

Her mouth watered at the thought at the delicious treats.

Jayden would love this.

Jayden.

The object of her affections in a time long past.

He made it eventually.

Although he missed the evacuation, he came to his senses immediately after the rapture of the church. From then, those left behind had to resist the Antichrist and many died for their faith. Jayden was one of them.

He's immortal, in his resurrected body now.

Unlike Emunah, he preferred exploring the stars, discovering new planets and letting his creativity go wild in developing them. They pledged to meet each year for old time's sake, to catch up. After all, they had all eternity to experience the fullness of this new life.

Her thoughts wandered to her old friend, Emma.

Pain wracked her heart.

Not physical pain. That's not possible in this new body.

It's the emotions that hurt.

Memories of Emma judged and sent to the lake of fire and brimstone for eternal, perpetual torment with no relief, for all eternity.

Tears streaming down her cheeks, she wept for her old companion.

"Why?" She asked.

"She made her choice," The Lamb of God replied, wiping her tears away with such tenderness, she melted. Pulling her into his embrace, his love enveloped her, chasing the pain away.

Free choice.

Emunah made her choice.

So did Emma.

What's yours?

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved.

John 3:16-17 NKJV

The Biblical Backdrop

Rapture, Tribulation, and Christ's Reign

The Emunah Chronicles unfold within a thrilling pre tribulation interpretation of Bible Prophecy. Here's the epic stage for these stories:

Pre-Tribulation Rapture

Before the world plunges into chaos, the *Day of Jesus Christ* dawns. The Lord Jesus descends to the air, rapturing His Church—believers transformed with glorified bodies—to Heaven (1 Thess 4:13-17). This sudden vanishing leaves the earth reeling, setting the stage for books like *Disturbing Dreams* and *Emunah*. Curious about the calm before the storm? Dive in!

The 7-Year Tribulation

Post-Rapture, the Day of the Lord unleashes God's wrath in Daniel's 70th Week—a 7-year Tribulation of seals, trumpets, and bowls (Rev 4-19). The beast and false prophet deceive the world, but Christ returns to crush them, binding Satan for 1000 years. Stories like The Beast's Mark and Mei plunge you into this dark, redemptive chaos—ready to face it?

Millennial Rule of Lord Jesus Christ

After the Tribulation, Christ reigns for 1000 years in the Millennial Kingdom, the 7th Dispensation (Rev 20). A literal kingdom centred in Jerusalem, it fulfils God's promises to Israel and brings worldwide blessing. The Adventures of Billy Lionheart shines in this era of peace.

Want to see the world remade?

Explore these events and more in the Emunah Short Stories, The Emunah Chronicles and The Adventures of Billy Lionheart, by the author, Janice Wee. Each book weaves faith, suspense, and prophecy into an unforgettable journey!

[1] Their story is told in Emunah Short Stories book 3: Emunah. By Janice Wee.

[2] Leo is one of the main protagonists in the Emunah Chronicles novel, The Quest for Immortality. By Janice Wee.

[3] Oliver's story is found in Emunah Short Stories book 2: Oliver. By Janice Wee.

[4] Penelope first appears in Emunah Short Stories book 1: Abigail. By Janice Wee.

[5] Liam's full story appears in Emunah Short Stories book 5: Liam. By Janice Wee.

[6] The Hora is a circle dance. It is one of the hallmarks of a Jewish wedding reception.

Don't miss out!

Visit the website below and you can sign up to receive emails whenever Janice Wee publishes a new book.

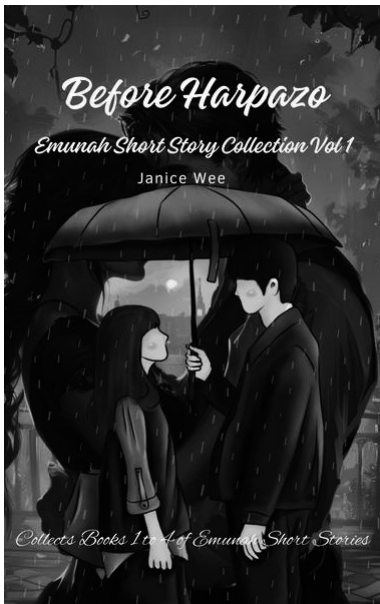
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Connecting independent readers to independent writers.

Did you love *Disturbing Dreams*? Then you should read *Before Harpazo*¹ by Janice Wee!



1. <https://books2read.com/u/3LJgd7>

2. <https://books2read.com/u/3LJgd7>

In "Before Harpazo," embark on a journey through a world poised on the brink of the Rapture. This collection of short stories from Janice Wee's series: *Emunah Short Stories*, explores the lives of ordinary individuals thrust into extraordinary circumstances, each story revealing a different facet of love, faith, and the battle between good and evil.

Abigail: Enamored by a gorgeous hunk, Abigail faces a difficult choice between her newfound attraction and her loyal best friend, who has hidden feelings for her. Will she follow her heart or heed her friend's silent plea?

Oliver: As a devoted soul-winner, Oliver's life takes a dark turn when he becomes the target of a mysterious evil being from the spiritual realm. Will his unwavering faith be enough to protect him from the forces that seek to destroy him?

Emunah: Navigating the complexities of love and friendship, Emunah finds herself entangled in a conspiracy involving evil aliens and occult practices. With

her best friend at her side, she must uncover the truth and free a cursed friend before it's too late.

John: In a tale of perseverance and determination, John, an underdog weightlifter, trains relentlessly to compete in a championship that could save his ailing mother. With the odds stacked against him, will he rise to the challenge and secure the prize?

"Before Harpazo" is Volume 1 of the Emunah Short Story Collections, offering readers a unique blend of romance, suspense, and supernatural elements. Each story is a testament to the power of faith and the resilience of the human spirit in the face of impending change.

Read more at www.janicewee.com.

Also by Janice Wee

Emunah Chronicles

The Quest For Immortality

Disturbing Dreams

The Beast's Mark

The Quest For Immortality

The Characters & Events in The Quest for Immortality

Emunah Short Stories

Abigail

Oliver
Emunah
John
Mei
Liam's Dark Secrets
Lydia's 12 Christmases
Mary's Flight

Emunah Short Story Collection

Before Harpazo
The Mark and the Martyr

Short Stories from Long Hill

Chico & Yvette
Max the Cat
The Scouts
Escape To Long Hill
Max & Friends

Tales From Singapore

Singapore's Runaway

Two Worlds, One Love & a Serial Killer

Two Worlds

Naughty Little Nonya

Little Nonya's Escapades

The Adventures of Billy Lionheart

Billy The Lion Boy

Billy & Bluma. Double Trouble.

Secret Hero & His Flying Lion

Standalone

Escape

Sweetcorn Suzie

Dragon Unbound

Watch for more at www.janicewee.com.



About the Author

Janice Wee is Straits Born Chinese from Singapore.

She is a sixth generation Singaporean, the daughter of two English teachers and who spent her childhood in libraries.

Learn more about the worlds and characters in her stories in her website janicewee.com

Read more at www.janicewee.com.

