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THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS **DARKLY**

A True Tale of Awakening

BY

JOSHUA DYLAN ROBERTS

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INTRODUCTION:

Birth always happens on either end of our candlestick of life. But sometimes the light of consciousness will reveal a new birth halfway through the process of burning out. This tale happens to be based on a true account of just such an awakening.

The journey involved in these dawns, however, is seldom linear, nor peaceful. This is especially true if we rebel against Kairos' seasons by forcing the awakening synthetically. We then arise before the Sun does – to a world abundant in darkness, to a Wonderland that is confusing and hazardous. "For now we see through a [looking-] glass, darkly" (1 Cor. 13:12).

Yes, this Wonderland has been glimpsed in all cultures – Lewis Carroll depicted it as a place where you grow or shrink depending on the type of nourishment you consume; where the Mad Hatter dares to ask a riddle that he doesn't even know the answer to, and then is marveled at the mystery of it when it's asked back to him; a strange place where a quest for home is preceded by the question, "Who are you?"

Alice couldn't answer the question of identity. And neither could our new friend Malakai when he was asleep in his adolescent knowledge.

"I don't know sir," Alice replied to the caterpillar, "I've changed so many times since this morning, you see...everything is so confusing."

Indeed it is. Well, when one wants to tell a story about a journey home, the maddest of them all - the Mad Hatter himself - has certain advice:

"Start at the beginning, and when you come to the end...stop."

But we shall ignore the fool and start in the thick of things.

CHAPTER 0.5: A Flash from the Future

Cape Town, South Africa – Kai's 25th rotation around the sun

Malakai's sweaty hand clung to the orange plastic of the axe handle, unable to let go. It was the axe that had the grip on *him*, and the *spirit* that had the grip on the axe. Cold Cape Town rain relentlessly dampened Kai's now matted hair as it stuck to his head like a failed film of protection. He knew all too well that it wasn't him who needed the protection.

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His wet hand automatically stretched itself out into the darkened doorway to ring the bell of his grandfather's house. He could picture Papa's droopy cheeks quiver into a surprised smile when he would creak open the door to discover his drenched grandson on the porch at 4:30am. He wouldn't have a chance to see the axe. Kai knew that what he had come to do, he had to do quickly. He would have to go out of himself temporarily and launch into the first hack. It would be the only way that he'd be able to get through the gruesome process and finally eat him. He wished with clenched teeth that he didn't have to go through with this. But it was blatantly the will of god, and Kai was his servant.

PART 1: PRIMITIVE MONISM

...5 Years Earlier...

CHAPTER 1: A Mug Shot of this Capetonian

In most areas of life Kai had trouble committing to decisions. One thing that he was certain of, though, was that Friday night was the best night of the week – hands down!

“Oooo life is good!” Kai’s excitement bubbled up into a verbal outpouring of emotion as he prepared himself for a night on the town. He’d dressed himself in vibrant, complementary colors in order to attract attention. He joined in the complementary nature of his clothes’ colors by stamping his seal of approval on the reflection that stared back at him from the lounge mirror. Finally the hair. He strategically ruffled his lightly-gelled locks, intentionally creating the look of being unintentional. His hair was a big part of what got him chicks, he reckoned. It stood up so he stood out. Africa was quickly catching up with the self-expression of Western Individualism and, being a surfer, Kai was ready to ride the forefront of that wave!

The flash of his silver watch reflected the gleam in his eye as he checked to see how much longer he had to wait ‘til he could pick his buddy up. This was the adult version of “Are we there yet?” and he was delighted that the watch resounded with an affirmative answer: “9:15pm - the time has come!”

Every time the line “the time has come” reared up in his thoughts, a part of his brain automatically generated the remaining verses from his childhood obsession with Alice in Wonderland: “‘The time has come,’ the Walrus said, ‘to talk of other things, of shoes and ships and ceiling wax, of cabbages and kings.’” Now Kai was an oyster who was neither in the process of being eaten by the Walrus nor the Carpenter. Buddha and Jesus were as mythological as Alice herself because, unbeknownst to Kai, his shell was still too tightly closed from the inside to be in any danger of being consumed by them. Nay, out of all the things in Lewis Carroll’s line, Kai was most likely to be the *king*! A Capetonian king! (Cabbage was relevant

too: his friend JP's place did in fact smell like cabbage perennially. But never fear, Kai would soon alleviate his misfortunate friend of the stench of his poverty in...20 minutes and counting.)

JP lived in one of Cape Town's slums, Mitchell's Plain - a smorgasbord of tin and cardboard ingeniously fused together with the remnants of an African community mindset. He and his family were close. After all, 5 of them shared what resembled a one-bedroom place, with no bathroom door for crying out loud! The stench of poverty sometimes smells worse than cabbage.

But Kai's mission was to introduce his bru to a more intimate kind of closeness, one that colored folk like JP seem to have a genetic predisposition towards: hooking up with a white girl! Yes. And if his social generosity happened to land Kai one of these Capetonian Caucasian catches too, then a worker deserves his wages, and he was ready for some frivolous spending. Ah life was indeed good. Who needs more than jolling (partying), estrogen crusades (girls), and a morning surf to kick the hangover?

Malakai's car chugged to a halt at 9:42pm. The prearranged meeting place was devoid of JP's eager smile. He was late; he was often late. Time in Africa doesn't work like it does in the Western world; the party starts when everyone gets there. Time serves the people, not vice versa.

Only sets of still, shadowy figures made the place seem like it was inhabited. Kai's 20 years had given him the foresight to veer away from venturing too far into the depths of Mitchell's Plain's crime-stricken streets after dark. He began a text to Sonya, his latest estrogen venture.

"How's a cigarette my bru?" emerged the Cape Colored accent from deep within the solemn night. It was the echo-location of a beast searching for prey, and Kai was born in the year of the rat. 'Ah I'm not in the mood man,' he groaned to himself.

"Sorry bru, I don't smoke," he retorted like a semi-conscious fly swat. It's a hand-waving mechanism that every Capetonian has to employ a dozen times a day to dismiss the beggars, the consumers of the rotten. But the swat was performed on fly territory this time and it was in vain as the hooded figures kept approaching Kai's parked car. 'What do these sketchy characters want?'

Halfway through his irritated thought, instinct rose to stabilize the blur of his distractibility. Danger! He reached for the window handle and began winding it up to put glass between their classes. The gang-member was too quick though, and lunged straight for the door handle. It was open. The door was wrenched from Kai's clambering hand as his nonchalant attempt at dismissal rapidly evolved into an African survival of the fittest clash.

"Hey!!" Kai blared in an attempt to pollute his assailant's senses with a noise cloud of ink. The smell of ash and dirty hair was upon Kai like the attack of a dust hurricane, and the battle of brain vs. brawn sucked him in. He swiveled in his driver's seat and pushed himself back into the corner of the passenger side, heart pounding. His legs found themselves jammed out and kicking. A subconscious innovation had employed them as muscular springs that catapulted his attacker back a moment or two in time. This had gotten serious quickly and he was grateful for the time he had just bought himself. Time is everything.

His peripheral vision grew clustered with other teenage colored kids lunging into the pried-open door, trying to extract Kai like a limp sardine from the metal can of his car.

All yelling, swearing! Noise and shaking; Kai was sweating.

Darkness was trying to get in.

Some of the gang went around to the passenger door. Thank you Lord that it was locked or it would have been the end of his fight! It'd only be a matter of time 'til they broke that window and broke his defense along with it. Kai was faced with the choice of whether he was going to succumb to the invasion and give them what they wanted, or aggravate them further with his sustained resistance. What did they want? His wallet, his car, his *life*? 'Over my dead body you punks!' Kai resolutely determined to himself between gritting teeth.

As if in opposition to Kai's resolve, the situation rose to the occasion and threatened his mortality. The cold silver of a dull blade gleaned Kai's wrist as the primary penetrator writhed to get the knife to his throat.

"Gimme yo bliksem se wallet," sneered the squinted-eyed dirty face.

"No WAYS brah!" Kai blurted, "HELP!!"

His primary concern was that he had his driver's license in his wallet, and if it was stolen it would be a mission and half to get another one in disorganized Africa. Without it he couldn't get into clubs. And that's exactly where he was on his way to! It was too big a part of who he was. 'I could play this game all night,' Kai's adrenaline told him. But no, he preferred his partying plans and these little kids were not about to steal them!

His rational mind was silently surprised at this valiant attempt to save something not worth saving. He knew this was a robbery attempt; he knew it was a serious one. But from

somewhere unexpected within him came an invigorating assertiveness and defiance. It was a game. Life was a quest. He knew he could hold them back, but not for much longer.

“Help!” he cursed out again with bellowing tenacity. Where were the police when you need them? Curse South Africa and its lawlessness!

“Oi!” boomed a triumphant cry in the distance, and instantly the little rat was off Kai, scurrying away into the night like a hyena running from an approaching lion. The group scattered along with him, limp flesh stripped of its bones. ‘It must be JP!’ Kai slammed the door shut and locked it, squinting through his salted-up windscreen to see his local buddy disperse the shadows with his light.

Fireworks were unleashed in full force inside Kai’s chest cavity, devoid of color in their explosions. Just black. Now the fear was setting in.

‘It’s over,’ he repeated to himself insistently. When the broken down record of his mind would once again respond to the DJ, he was permitted to think, ‘and those little punks didn’t get my wallet!’ Suddenly he was amped!

Whenever heartbeats are shoved into a constricted timespan, time itself makes room for them. It must have been a few seconds, but it felt like minutes, before JP was banging on the window of Kai’s metal-enclosed safe zone that shut the dark world out. His friend’s familiar and acknowledging eyes never looked so human, and Kai opened his heart, and the door for his good buddy.

“What the hell bru?!” JP proclaimed with itchy pent-up fists and a mild snarl. His face was a testimony to his protest against the injustice Kai had just been exposed to on his home turf. His protest quickly melted into smile lines and a chuckle, however, after noticing that Kai’s eyes

were now gleaming with amusement. Being outraged at injustice on a continent like Africa is just wasted gas in a cul-de-sac. Mutually friendly teeth bore wide smiles – lion's teeth aren't always viscous. They slapped hands into a firm grip that unites brethren, and Kai's world felt like home again. Home – a place packed with life's epic pursuits: partying, girls, and surfing.

CHAPTER 2: "Jolling" – Punk's Alcoholic Pop

"Yoh!" JP yelled unnecessarily loudly when they were cozy in their car cage. "Let's bail boet, blast it!"

Kai instantly RSVP'd yes to JP's invitation to join him in party mode. In moments the punk rock bass re-immersed the two boytjies in safe South Africa – the rainbow nation, where gold triumphs over cold steel at the end of many a colorful journey. Kai jammed the up volume button, taking out any pent up anxiety on his eardrums.

Blink 182's pacey harmonics reverberated with their increasingly shared heartbeats and ignited the latent energy within them.

"I got no regrets right now (I'm feeling this)..."

Where do we go from here (I'm feeling this)...

Let me go in her room (I'm feeling this)...

I wanna take off her clothes (I'm feeling this).

Fate fell short this time, smile fades in the summer.

Place your hand in mine, I'll leave when I wanna."

Fate had fallen short this time, at least for those rats – Kai still had his life and his driver's license. Girls were their destiny now. Blink's raw basal energy and light-hearted lyrics echoed the carefree, short-range exhilaration of Kai's youth. The Californian music scene resonated with the beats of third-world hearts – South Africa was all about American music, as the globe increasingly shared a unifying culture.

'All's well that ends well,' Kai thought. Besides, the added dose of adrenalin was starting Friday night off on the right foot. (It's well known that the left one is too fickle a foot to start a dance move out on. Unless of course you're wasted, and then nothing mattered.) Kai couldn't wait for the intoxicated annihilation of worries to set in, and a preliminary trip to the local Shebeen solidified the oblivion's imminent arrival.

Kai always felt a little sketchy swinging by those places, where he was inevitably the only white guy amidst a sea of drunk and suspicious colored peeps. Suspicion abounded between the races: suspicious-looking individuals, suspiciously gawking at Kai. He did his best to keep his eyes down.

Shebeens were garages attached to the houses of locals in the South African ghettos. They were the only places that sold alcohol after all the liquor stores closed at 5. So it was a necessary endeavor, and one embarked on by every sketchy hoodlum in the vicinity. Kai hadn't been comfortable with these African watering holes since that one night he had seen a beastly fight break out at the Shebeen around the corner from JP's spot, and then heard gun shots being fired after they had rounded the corner on their escape path. JP always assured him that it was chill though, and Kai's confidence lay in having him by his side as an authenticity badge.

JP's gold-colored skin bore somewhat of a Midas charm with it, making him seem dangerous thanks to South African stereotypes. In fact, it was probably the muggers' recognition of JP's colored accent that caused them to run. Why else? It was 8 on 2, and neither Kai nor JP were particularly buff. Kai was working on that. Unspoken respect goes a long way in the lower realms of the third world.

JP was Cape Colored, bearing the lineage of the Khoisan bushmen who roamed the sub-Saharan plains as nomads on a lifelong journey to survive. Wanderers in search of a home. Kai could relate.

Coloreds and whites each account for 10% of South Africa's population, and blacks rock the other 80%. So JP and Kai were in the same minority, although this was seldom a reason to unite the two races. Coloreds have been dealt the short end of the racial stick for a decades. Being brown, they are too white to benefit from being black, and too black to benefit from being white.

JP had certain aspects in common with blacks, and certain in common with whites. And yet a lot of neither. Only the unsophisticated thought that life could be delineated into clear black and white divides. He wore a mishmash of used westernized clothing, (mostly hand-me-downs from Kai), and was interested in almost all the same kinds of things that Kai was. Because of the outward similarities, Kai would never have guessed at the time how fundamentally different his culture's view of Reality was from the one Kai had inherited from his own culture – that of the English who landed in the Cape of Good Hope in the 19th century.

JP's disposition did fascinate Kai though. He graced the same satisfied ambience that Kai would observe on the faces of squatter camp laborers walking to work at 4am in the

morning, ready for 16 hour days, as Kai returned from a night of partying. How could people living under such repressive conditions be so happy? Surely self-esteem was directly proportional to one's bank balance? That's the way it was with the whites, at least.

You see, Table Mountain separated Cape Town's Hollywood from its Congo, and a mountainous difference in attitude existed between the two realms. Old Madiba had planted the mustard seed of faith necessary to move the metaphoric version of that mountain, but change takes time to grow. Kai didn't really have the patience for that. Life was too short – he wanted thrill.

He was in luck, because JP's lack of opportunity endowed him with a contagious exuberance on their excursions. Kai loved taking him on party missions to the other realm. You know, exposing Cinderella to the ball. Having him along always managed to turn an average night into a riveting cross-cultural expedition that rivaled those of the colonials. Yet this time Kai and JP were on the same team!

Right at that particular moment, the team spirit was growing rapidly thanks to their 23% alcohol ally. The warmth of the Shebeen's sherry had dissolved the walls around Kai's chest and was allowing his heart to flow out. It vibrated in unison with the music, and with JP's heart, and with the jaggedy ride of Kai's green Golf.

Drinking and driving is partying 101 in South Africa. No one can afford to taxi it, and there is no other safe public transport. Staying sober was not an option. Duh. It was nil worries though 'cos law enforcement was a hot mess. Mostly just a mess. Everyone knew that murderers could bribe their way out of the slippery hands of the law with R10000, which a waiter could save in a couple of months. But Kai loved the lack of law when it enabled him to

enjoy the freedom that alcohol brings. Thank you South African Police Department. He had already forgotten how differently he had felt about the SAPD earlier while he was being mugged. How did he feel about Law in general? He didn't know, really. And he wasn't concerned about his lack of conviction.

The moment he found himself in was allowing the number one concern to be Kai and his good time. He was thoroughly wrapped up in the euphoric bubble that his early twenties enclosed him in. Immortality, infallibility, and indestructibility was the air he breathed. That air was sufficiently saturated with sherry as they neared the clubbing district, where the streets began to come alive with young people, all heading in the same direction – towards bliss.

As Kai swung his 15 year old car into the right turn of the causeway that led to the club, JP selected their traditional entrance song. Reliant K blared through the speakers:

*“We are the pirates who don't do anything, we just stay at home and lie around.
And if you ask us to do anything, we'll just tell you we don't do anything.”*

The boys loved the shock factor in being random, and had no qualms about going against the pretentious grain – in fact they went out of their way to resist trend. Many were the days of going to a crowded mall on the weekend and making swimming motions while lying on the floor. Kai's older self would wonder whether this was a way of constructing their emerging identities by rejecting the culturally assigned ones. But then Kai's older self was boring. Yes, yes, he'd heard the expression “non-conformists are all the same”, but personally Kai had never seen another one doing breaststroke amidst a sea of wind-swept people flowing around them. Just blowing. No direction. Poor people.

Tonight was yet another occasion for their antics. They wound down both windows so that the ridiculous lyrics could blare out. A stale cereal smell assaulted Kai's nostrils. It was the brewery next door. Through their own music they could hear the bass thumping from inside the club, a primal call to all with ears to hear. Kai purposely stalled his car on the speed bump outside the club entrance, where the pretentious jocks ran rigid fingers through their monotonous hair. The boys' laughter overpowered their song, and became it, as they resumed their parking mission.

"Yoh, check out those hotties!" JP said.

Their sugar high from ingesting Capetonian eye candy was setting in.

"Should we chug one of these now?" Kai suggested, holding up one of the Castle beer quarts they had bought at the Shebeen earlier. He was sure glad he had surmounted his previous paranoia about hitting that place, as the green bottle's gleam beamed better adventure in his direction.

"Hell yeah Ou!" JP squawked.

The two bruvva's guzzled the bubbles, shoved in some gum, and began their strut.

CHAPTER 3: ESTROGEN CRUSADE

Chapter 3.1: Estrogen Crusade - Intoxicated with Lust

Their strategy, pre-discussed and tried and tested, was to pretend not to notice any girls, all the while assessing which ones were watching them using their peripheral vision. Girls use

this strategy all the time, and Kai joined the equality of the sexes bandwagon that had yet to fully permeate the old school Afrikaans-driven culture. One of the two of them would migrate in imperceptible increments towards the girls who bore promise of summer warmth. The whole process was infused with a kaleidoscopic, heart adrenaline blur that the alcohol produced and that emotion sustained.

The alcohol had blurred the lines of separation between people, making it less awkward to initiate conversations. A gorgeous brunette returned Kai's migration towards her with a faint smile and a flick of the hair. A flick of the hair? There was only one thing *that* meant: he was in!

"Go for it my bru," JP whispered. He must have seen her hair flick too.

But a dilemma had been flicked onto the scene too: if he committed to her by flirting now, that will dismiss all of his other options for the rest of the night. It was only 11pm - the night was but a puppy. I mean yeah, she seemed sweet. But Kai was holding out for a girl who was perfectly hot, and perfectly cool at the same time. Reasonable, right? He decided to postpone his advance until later in the night to see what other options surfaced.

'Argh,' Kai grunted to himself at 2am, all the while maintaining the external appearance of revelry. 'That guy just came up to the only sweet-looking her and got all up in her face. Geez bru, he's virtually forcing her to dance with him! I hate that approach, and I'll never do it.' The lack of intelligent game that Kai's competitor used reeked of unclassiness, and Kai was surprised that girls would go for that. He'd rather go home alone!

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