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THROUGH THE LOOKING-GLASS **DARKLY**

A True Tale of Awakening

BY

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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 dawnings, 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!

As the night wound on, though, and each potential target of Kai and JP's proceeded to get ransacked by barbaric Africans, going home alone seemed like an increasingly likely outcome. And one that's prize of moral gloating was progressively diminishing in its satisfaction.

'Ok I've still got time, let's make this happen!' Kai determined as his expectations switched gears. The switching process was one that he was all too familiar with, and that sometimes made him wonder whether there were two different entities living inside him. He would be much obliged to whichever one could land him a meisie right now.

JP had turned his attention toward two girls they had met a couple of weeks before who had emerged from the Wonderland known as the female restroom.

"Hey man, these chicks are decent, and there's two of them, and two of us!" JP beamed as he presented his indisputable case. Kai loved his relentless enthusiasm.

"Two plus two equals score dude! They seem lank interested, and I need my dose of estrogen son!" Kai said with a smirk.

A flurry of flirtatious smiles, whiffs of perfume, and 'accidental' caresses landed them right where they wanted to be: back at the one girl's apartment. Through fizzled distraction, Kai found a piece of happiness. For a moment, he didn't want to be anywhere else.

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A garbage truck inconsiderately awakened Kai from his open-mouthed slumber the next morning. As the room and vague memories from the night before came flooding back to him, it made the place he was in seem like a worthy candidate for the garbage truck to visit. He wanted

to get out... immediately if possible. It's not that she's wasn't cool or anything but he hated situations like that and he felt disgusting.

Like a dirty soldier from the trenches of a battle won, Kai and JP started a prompt and victorious exit before the carnage had a chance to catch up to them. While the girls slept in Disney slumber, their Prince Charmings crept to the door like black ninjas, feeling dark and guilty despite the ninja honor. Guess the girlies should've known better than to believe that life begins and ends in a Disney castle.

The dark feeling quickly evaporated with the flood of sunshine that welcomed them back to the waking world, as they navigated the unfamiliar corners back to Kai's car.

"YES BRU!" JP blurted out when they were sure they were out of earshot of the girls' place. He went into gory detail about what went down in the trenches, and told Kai without a hint of reservedness how he was in love and had found his dream girl. He triumphantly reached for his pocket to take out his phone and text her.

"Dude I'm stoked you dig her," Kai held up his hand to interrupt JP's attempt, "but you always do this. A little attention and you just jump into Casanova mode and chase the girl away with your over-eagerness. If you want her, my man, then take it easy. Let her miss you a bit. Girls are suckers for the dance, the imagination, filling the gaps with her own ideas about what she wants you to be."

Kai knew that JP was grateful for the assertion of Kai's guruhood, which he shared with their white buddy Psyche, when it came to psychology and the paradoxical mystery of what attracted Western women. Although JP was particularly attracted to white girls, as was prominent in his culture, the attraction in the opposite direction didn't bear the same prominence.

Colored girls and white girls operated differently, and the caresses of Kai's previous conquests bore a silent consensus amongst the boys of his colonial cultural grasp.

"Ok cool bru, I'll wait," JP conceded. "What should I say when I do text her?"

"Make it something original, something she wouldn't expect. And leave it a little open for interpretation. Like use some kinda whitty humor; a clever analogy or pun. And don't be over-eager my bru." Kai had a glimmer of semi-conscious worry that this approach was short-sighted in that it was more likely to make her fall for the kind of person *Kai* was rather than the puppy dog that JP was. But puppies were ill-equipped to handle the complexity of interactions of girls in the modern world. It's not simple. Simple is lame, anyway. Opposites attract, but yet it is shared values that keep couples together. Women respect a sensitive guy and one who's perfected the art of active listening, but they don't want a door mat. JP's African simplicity was noble yet dangerous in a world where survival of the fittest eliminates the ignorant first. Kai refused to be eliminated. And he refused to eliminate his reservoir of options by settling for a girl who was anything less than perfect. No, Kai had one life, and was intent on finding the perfect girl, the perfect social circle, career, and country.

"Sweet man, shot. Maybe you can help me with that. What you wanna do today?"

"I've gotta crash bru, I might go for a surf later." Kai shut down the possibility of hanging out in one of his typical post-party hermit morphs. After nights like that he felt that he needed his time to digest it all and enjoy the introspective mood that hangovers left him with.

In his early 20's hangovers always left him; and *he* always left the girls.

CHAPTER 3.2: Estrogen Crusade – One Choice Eliminates

Millions

Kai's evaporating hangover left room for him to try to knock out some university assignments.

He wasn't sure what he want kind of career he wanted, or whether the concept of a career was outdated. With so many options of life paths to choose from, his generation felt like a deer frozen in the headlights of choice. In past generations, sons would do what their fathers did; daughters would aspire to marry. Boring. But Kai was in the process of learning that with much choice comes much room for regret.

Despite growing up poor, his lifelong infection of the travel bug had led him to overseas cash opportunities that made him the envy of his African brethren on his return. The UK had been his wallet's ally. Since he left high school he had following the wind across England, Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, working in live-in jobs, or whatever sustenance happened to blow his direction. 'Commitment is for old people,' Kai would tell himself assuredly. He'd do what he wanted, when he wanted. But what did he want? At the moment he was grumbling about his attempt to commit to a field of study. Psychology was more of an interest pursuit than a career hoop jump, but a lot of the time it seemed dry. He figured it would help him get girls, anyway.

"Schemas", he begrudgingly read "are cognitive maps that help us encode, organize, and interpret reality." 'Ah I can't concentrate properly. Why do I have to know about schemas and neurons and other people's theories? Let's see, what other modules do I have? "Kubler Ross' stages of grief are denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance." Hmmm, I wonder what it would be like to go through that.'

He thought back to when his dad was found dangling from a rope that creaked under his weight as it twisted. In retrospect, Kai *did* recognize some of old Kubler Ross' stages. Like he couldn't believe that it was real. He was inconsolably angry at his dad for such a pathetic and weak decision. Acceptance huh? More like learning to live with it. The irreversibility of death stuck with him. But despite his brush with death during the mugging attempt, he felt pretty safely immune, although the mugging *had* made him more conscious of how little time he may have left in this life. Linkin Park's track started on repeat in his mind:

"Time is a valuable thing, watch it clock by as the pendulum swings, watch it count down to the end of the day, the clock ticks life away, it's so unreal."

'Ja, none of this seems too relevant to my life right now, I'm not amped for this at the moment to go into this. Alice was right: "How can one possibly pay attention to a book with no pictures in it?"' He forcefully slammed the book shut in defiance of his syllabus and finger walked his way through his pile of text books looking for something that might be mildly amusing. "Philosophy 101". 'Plato, Descartes, Hegel. Who's Hegel? He read:

"History has three phases. [It] moves from a condition of Primitive Monism to a Dualistic Split, only to make a third leap back to a kind of restored unity, but a unity which is on a higher level: a Differentiated Unity."

The lecturer started likening this split to the teenage years, and the evolution of various religions, and history. 'It's history man, gone. Why do we go into such depth in this old-school philosophy when the world and our bodies are being made new every day? Teach me how to understand people, teach me how to understand reality!' Kai was too distracted by a series of text exchanges between him and Sonya.

Sonya was a nice girl, a pure snowdrop. She had had a crush on Kai back in high school but he was too laden with teenage over self-consciousness to capitalize on it. His shyness had prevented him from converting her crush into anything more than a written confession of his mutual affection in a letter he quickly slipped to her before recess ended. The opportunity itself quickly slipped into recess.

But after he came back from his first UK trip at 18 he had bumped into her at the mall. He allowed his new-found confidence to lay the charm back on her and strutted away with her phone number.

See traveling had allowed Kai to reinvent himself in each successive town, honing in closer and closer to the type of personality that was buried beneath layers of expectation that people who he'd grown up with had endowed upon his personality. Expectations have a way of becoming self-fulfilling prophecies, and Kai had seized the opportunity to prophesy a new way of being into his life. His growing charisma was beginning to manifest in outward evidence, the most recent of which were these beeps of his phone.

He loved these text conversations, saturated with innuendo and latent chemistry. He got an adrenaline surge each time his phone beeped and he consciously refused to choose dull text books over real life texting vigor. Menial, flirtatious chatter morphed into a concrete time and place to meet up. That, in turn, morphed into that time being upon Kai. And him being nervous.

He pulled into the beach parking lot where he had arranged to meet Sonya. The ramifications for the future of this relationship receded like ripples honing in on their point of origin – colliding in a seismic thump in his chest. Solemn echoes of his thoracic cavity drowned out the sound of the kids playing at the beach. The gnawing tug to return to his comfort zone

awoke him to the importance he placed on Sonya. "Why? I've got plenty of other options," he said aloud, searching within his psyche.

These questions were directed at Truth itself. Deep within his soul, a wiser voice was trying to emerge. This voice was subliminally present, but yet could never shout loud enough through the noise of his ego to allow it to be audible to his conscious mind. He was too complacent in his present life to allow this voice to run the risk of changing what he was in the process of setting up. He wanted answers to these questions, but he didn't want those answers to push him out of his comfort zone.

Therefore, his conscious mind wouldn't allow him to consider that the emphasis he was putting on Sonya was perhaps a form of self-redemption to make amends for his awkward teenage phase. Nor would it let him see that the consolation he found in having other options was a mask to hide him from the ego blow of failure. Since he was living in ego mode during this phase of life, if he lost that then who would he be?

All he knew was that a shot of tequila would really help right now. But he had tried that strategy another time, with this other girl, and their relationship had been wasted from there. It worked two nights ago at the club, though, and the taste of success was still in his mouth. That taste had been mingled with the evaporating tinge of intoxication, and Pavlov's dog was learning to associate that intoxication tinge with happiness. Why was it so easy when he's wasted? The wiser voice of the two within him had been trying to tell him that alcohol had become a source of pseudo confidence in his life that he couldn't quite call his own. He had tried plenty of times to stop, but decided against it when the situation arose. You hear? *Decided*. It wasn't in control; *he* was. Anyway, Kai didn't have time for any of this now.

'Time to get in the zone.' He glanced at his watch and grimaced when he saw he had 4 minutes left. Trying to remain calm while searching for his favorite song, he fumbled with his headphones in an attempt to multitask. The familiar beats filled the emptiness of the situation, and soon energy started to rise.

As he exited the vacuum of his car, the strong South Easterly wind tugged at his hair in a malicious attempt to mess with his planning. He wanted it to look windswept, but at *his* discretion! He wanted to *be* swept away, but at *his* discretion.

Scurrying to get out of the wind, he spotted Sonya. His heart missed two beats as he turned to face her larger than life presence, and he couldn't help but burst into a genuine smile. Their eager eyes met in a still-motioned freeze frame before rationality took over and caused their gazes to drop in an attempt to reduce the awkwardness as they made their way towards each other.

"Malakai!" Sonya sang. Her melodious voice and sexy pitch locked Kai's mind in a repetition of his name. Even though his mother was the only one who called him Malakai, he liked it coming from her. Get back in your box, Freud.

Just like that it was upon him – the moment he had rehearsed in his mind innumerable times. And you know what? It wasn't *nearly* as stressful as he had imagined! It was charming, in fact, magical. The sound of the children playing and waves crashing faded back in, and became nature's symphonic approval of their searching gazes, pheromone-filled frolics, and soul-stirring laughs.

Kai's thoughts marveled at her persona, and then at themselves. 'Wow she's stunning in that riveting red dress! She's so sure of herself and where she wants to go in life. So serene.'

Geez dude, you're *into* her! Careful.' Their walk was never hampered by their arrival at the initially agreed upon destination, and Kai felt like he could walk the world with her.

Their conversation was unforced as they effortlessly played the preliminary rounds of the game that ultimately involved merging their plans and futures. It came in flashes – a gnawing urge to tell her exactly how he was feeling about her. But with no time delay at all, the rational voice would pull him back by reminding him of the consequences of doing that: a commitment to her would mean a dismissal of all his other options... forever. Kai loved options. He loved options more than he loved her. No, he would play it cool and engage with her cautiously and intentionally. Then he'd see what unfolded.

The moment never came for them to kiss, but Kai wasn't too upset because he knew it was only a matter of time. They embraced for a goodbye in expectancy, pressing into each other in a tantalizing temptation of what was to come. Her essence mingled with her perfume to create a heavenly aromatic envelope that Kai never wanted to leave.

'Wow, what a *catch*!' he triumphantly said aloud as he began to think through his game plan of how to get her to bite hook, line, and sinker.

He rode the emotional highway all the way through the next few hours. Colors never seemed so bright, and music never seeming so relevant or amping. He couldn't wait for their next encounter; he couldn't wait to taste her, to take it further. But if he cared about this girl he needed to play the game right and keep her interested instead of pulling a JP and wearing his heart on his sleeve. He mustered all the self-discipline he could and refrained from texting her that day, instead consoling himself by reading and rereading all the texts they had ever sent to each other. "This girl is a keeper," he mused.

Meanwhile, across town, Sonya was sharing the euphoria. She diarized her feelings in purple ink, cementing them for all time. Her calligraphy-like handwriting was a manifestation of her patience, passion, and commitment.

She checked her phone every 15 minutes.

Nothing.

Each time that she was dismissed callously by the blank screen, reality pushed the euphoria a little more back into its box. Sonya came from an old school South African upbringing. Girls are never to make the first move - that's only for the slutty and desperate - and she cared too much about what Kai thought of her to risk sending that impression by texting him first. That evening dimmed her day, and as her phone screen remained dark, her mood shadowed. She subconsciously laid the bricks of her first wall of defense against Kai in an effort to dampen the growing feeling of rejection.

'Why?' she wondered, 'I thought we had a great time. Maybe I should have talked less. I should have worn that white dress instead, I knew the red one made me look fat. He could have at least said goodnight.' Anger fused with disappointment and then morphed into a version of apathy that numbed the pain like emotional dry ice. The coldness was directed at a particular face - Kai's - and soon the earlier fireworks were silenced by the frigidity.

CHAPTER 4: SURFING

Chapter 4.1: Surfing - Salt Water's Song

The next morning consciousness filled Kai's nostrils with the smell of a vibrant future. Sunshine poured through his blinds bearing with it an invitation to join Cape Town in its perpetual adventure of existence. 'Sonya,' the thought sang to his mind. 'Sonya!' Energy pulsed through his lethargic muscles at the thought of her, and the excitement that today is the day he can initiate contact without seeming over-eager. He'd do it later though so it didn't seem like he thought of her first thing when he woke up. He didn't want her to think he was desperate or anything.

The late morning meandered purposefully towards a surf, as texts rolled in alerting him to the fact that the swell was doing a rolling in of its own. Not long later, a series of quick right turns of the head confirmed the rumors to be true as Kai drove one-handed towards Imawusi beach. The surf was firing! Crisp lines of illuminated turquoise arcs marched relentlessly from dark water towards the majestic mountains on the shore. 'Yoh it's going off!' Kai buzzed to himself, 'Ah, but it's crowded.'

The familiar face of the black car guard greeted him in the parking lot with an illogically genuine smile as he gestured towards the open parking spots. These guys don't get paid, but make a decent living off the tips that surfers throw their direction. R5 is a small price to pay to prevent the virtually inevitable havoc that the local thieves would reap on the surfer's possessions. Whether or not the car guards are affiliated with the thieves and turn a blind eye when the surfers don't tip is a matter of opinion amongst the Cape Town crew. One of the boys insisted that he had seen one of the guards scratch up his car himself after he didn't tip him. Despite knowing that he might be buying stock in the crime syndicate, Kai never failed to throw the guards a few bucks. He had to watch his own back and couldn't concern himself too much with the bigger picture. In Africa you don't sweat the small stuff; life's too short.

Dawi, an Afrikaans guy who was on Kai's surf team back in high school, was making his way towards the car park from an after-surf shower. He shook the water off of himself like a dog throttling a stick, a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction adorning his square jaw.

"Awe Dawi! Howzit out there?" Kai blurted in short surfer Morse code.

"Ah it's kiff hey! Dropping off a bit now as the tide picks up, it's a super high one today. But get out there ek se!" came Dawi's endorphin-fused reply.

"Shot, I'm on it!" yapped Kai.

And he wasn't lying. Seven minutes later he was broad-stroking his way through the emerald-capped glass, duck diving crisp white explosions that just seconds earlier were turquoise dragons of water. The first submersion immersed Kai back into a primal mode that he had become accustomed with since the first water-riding escapades of his early teens. A feeling of invigoration coursed through his body, and suddenly his mind was on nothing but reaching the backline and stroking into that first bomb set wave.

He was greeted with the standard greeting – the head fling nod and eye raise - by a couple of the local crew, which reminded him yet again that he's home, back from his isolated overseas escapades. He seemed to change so much while he was over there, but no one back home ever seemed in the least bit modified.

He strategically positioned himself where he had seen a couple of the cleaner sets come through while he was paddling out. Kai's legs dangled below him as he paused at the backline for a minute or two, catching his breath. His weight was comfortably supported by Mother Nature as he bobbed along the translucent surface of a creature that spanned three quarters of our planet. And today she was in playful mode.

A line appeared in the distance that was a deeper hue than the horizon. 'Oooo here comes a set,' Kai thought. He swiveled his legs around his board and began paddling towards it. There was a heavy-looking colored guy on his right hand side, also pummeling towards the coming wave with deep, committed strokes. Kai knew that the other guy had priority and could take the wave if he wanted to. Kai was always one for adhering to surf etiquette; he just hoped he'd mess it up. Surfing was kinda a communal sport, but kinda not. Or if there could be at least 2 waves then he'd be on the second one for sure.

To Kai's delight, the colored bloke paddled too far off towards the wrong side of the peak. 'He's too deep; he's not gonna make it around the section,' Kai convinced himself. It dawned on him that this beauty could be *his*! But would there be a wave behind it, and would it be better? After a moment's jerky hesitation, Kai decided to let it pass and hope for a bigger bomb behind it.

As he paddled over the towering wall of water, he gazed down the cascading arcs and mind-surfed the missed opportunity. It would have been sick! Kai's eager eyes caught a glimpse of what was coming. He was engulfed with a mixture of relief and disappointment - relief that there *was* a second wave, and disappointment that it was much smaller. Kai clenched his salted lips together in protest against his decision to let the last one go, and then made the most of what was left of the set. Ever the optimist, he conceded that this one wasn't bad either. Upon closer consideration, was it this very optimism itself that led him to think there may be something better behind the first opportunity?

No time to ponder his decision-making now; Kai had an upcoming chance. His heart jumped when the mound of water assumed Kai's paddling efforts as it effortlessly swept his board along with it. He had it! One quick stand-up motion later and Kai was dropping down the

face of a relentlessly forward-moving wall of water. His stomach enjoyed a brief moment of rollercoaster drop, the energy from which was fluently channeled into his thighs to initiate a deep bottom turn. The board pressed back against his feet and assured him of the power beneath it, as he pirouetted his body toward the feathering crest of the wave.

“Skaashhh” exclaimed the water when he slammed his board’s tail forcefully into the collapsing lip, freeing his fins into the back of the wave and generating a satisfaction that rivaled every other. The second bottom turn had to be delayed a split second because of a surfer paddling out into his line of choice.

Kai knew him. It was Rudi, a kid who he’d had a couple of mediocre chats to at his local bar, the Simbi. Rudi never seemed too perplexed by the paradoxes of life, and Kai enjoyed the youthful (or naïve) simplicity to his approach to living. And he wasn’t about to interrupt that carefree mindset with a surfboard to the eye, so Kai graciously pulled straight to avoid him, despite Rudi being in the wrong according to surfing etiquette. The section ran ahead of him and Kai had to pull out of the wave.

“That was a sick turn man, it looks fun out here!” Rudi shouted to Kai as their synchronized arms pulled them back out to the backline on a layer of post-wave froth.

“Shot bru, ya it’s pretty epic!” Kai smiled back at Rudi, holding back a lesson in avoiding getting in the way.

Surfers don’t talk too much during surfs. There is an unspoken understanding that verbal exchanges add too much of a lens of scrutiny to these tranquil yet riveting encounters with nature and yourself. As about 20 brethren silently bobbed up and down amongst the rolling swells, the salty air smelled like bliss. Kai was content with this thing called life; all felt right.

That was the last time it really did.

Chapter 4.2: Surfing - Something Sinister Lurks Beneath

Complacency

Without an intuitive hint of a warning, Malakai heard the sound of water breaking behind him, like an emersion from a bath tub. The next sound he heard was one he would never forget: Bones crunching... *Human* bones.

He violently swung around just in time to see Rudi's arms disappear into a dark shadow. The shadow dissolved into an ever expanding pool of red. Time stopped. So did Kai's heart. His mind staggered to come to grips with what he was witnessing. When it finally did, he noticed that his body had already responded by paddling unconsciously. His mind caught up and displayed it's conclusion in one bold word: SHARK!

He tried to yell "Shark" but a whisper creaked through his impotent mouth. "Shark!" he tried again between paddles, and this time the word croaked out, sounding unreal. No one needed to be told though, because their minds had also done the catch-up work necessary and they were frantically careening towards the shore.

Kai's mind attempted to fight the impulse to follow them. His eyes frantically darted amidst the cresting water looking for signs of Rudi. Eerily, crimson waves whispered back disaster. The only remnant of his friend and fellow human being was a grey board with a snapped leash, being lifelessly bobbed toward the shore by callous foamies.

'What am I supposed to do? I've gotta help, but where is Rudi? Surely he didn't make it, no one can lose this much blood! Should I swim down to see if he's there, maybe he's still alive? He might be alive! But that shark's still around here...'

The red pool of blood had swallowed his hands mid paddle now. He was in real danger. All of a sudden, Kai had to get out of there. He had to be on dry land. Instantly!

He found his arms continuing their frantic paddle back to shore, apparently without the consent of his mind. His thoughts took on a more primal tone, seeming to be controlled from somewhere else, somewhere deep within his hind brain. His fragmented ego didn't argue. The distance to shore seemed insurmountable. He needed a wave. Now!

"Please keep me safe Lord, please keep me safe", he prayed in fervent desperation. Prayer bubbled spontaneously into consciousness at times like this.

He'd already been paddling for what seemed like 20 minutes, but in reality was only 3. No waves. 'How typical, this is like a nightmare. Come on! Come ON!' his thoughts blared amidst the heart pounds and amplified sound of his breathing. He could sense the shark coming towards him. He heard water breaking behind him...waiting for the knock from underneath.

Some who were shallower had lucked into catching a foamy that catapulted them to shore. They were awkwardly running through waist-deep water yelling for help. Flashes of the crimson expanse of water kept harassing Kai's consciousness violently.

After an oceanic expanse of dream-like noncooperation, a wave broke just behind Kai and he rode the foaming conveyer belt towards safety. Finally he felt comfortable enough to look back. Wave after wave of red water broke upon itself heartlessly, creating pink foam balls that glared of unnaturalness. None of it felt real, and now that he knew he'd be safe he was

surprised at his coldness towards the whole thing. It was like his mind wasn't properly letting him experience it.

He found himself in shallow enough water to stand, and galloped through the remaining thick liquid towards the terrain where he belonged. Although this water wasn't blood-tinged, Kai still found it disgusting.

The series of events that followed enveloped Kai in a haze of surrealism spinning around him. He felt further away than where his body was, observing through distant lenses. His eyes registered a four-man lifeboat being sent out into the gruesome ocean in search of a fellow citizen.

Crowds...

Crying...

Kai stood amidst a now sizeable group of people watching, waiting. The boat bobbed in and out of the line of sight between swells of light red that were dissipating in saturation now. "That could have been me. I was right next to him, sitting like him. That *should* have been me, he was so young and full of life..." repeated the incessant taunts of Kai's out-of-control mind.

Yet despite the blur and commanding train of thought, Kai paused long enough to recognize that there was a serenity and power present that could almost tangibly be felt somewhere deep down inside him. And beyond him. The sensation was a surprise, and he questioned his seeming lack of emotional mourning towards his friend. Peace was *not* what he was expecting to feel in a situation like this!

The boat had turned around and was heading back. As it neared, Kai could make out one of the crew kneeling down, attention fixed on the boat's deck. They must have him. "Please Lord let him be ok. Please save his life," came the spontaneously ardent prayer for a kid who Kai was more and more revering as a dear friend. But when the faces of the crew became discernable, Kai could tell that it was over.

The boat charged into shore and lopsidedly cut into the sand. Two of the crew carried a mangled chunk of meat up the beach, and draped a blanket over the majority of it. "That can't be him," Kai reasoned, "That weirdly angled, gory mess can't be the life that I encounter on Friday nights." He tried to make his way over to the body but medical personnel had intercepted his path and placed it on a stretcher. "That's my friend! I bet I know him better than anyone here does!" resisted Kai's indignant thoughts. He jogged alongside the stretcher together with an ever-increasing buzz of surfers and beach-goers.

The red of the ambulance screamed blood and the siren was adding an unnecessary trauma to the situation. As it hastened off along the same road that Kai had arrived on just minutes earlier, when the world was a happy place, Kai watched his picture of a benevolent reality ride away with it.

INTERLUDE:

The first signs of a change of season were in the air. A dualistic split was dawning in which the monistic simplicity in Kai's worldly pursuits would no longer satisfy his thirsty soul. Muggings, killer fish? Kai's consciousness could no longer seek false comfort in the world of matter. Something deeper, all-encompassing needed to emerge.

But how? Kai didn't have the catalyst that was needed to step into his cocoon of metamorphosis, and so was instead thrust into the dark womb of depression.

CHAPTER 5: Empty Jaws of Life

The next few days bore down on Kai like an anvil cloud of infuriatingly diverse emotions. It didn't make sense. Confusion and anger: 'How do such ridiculously barbaric creatures exist? What kind of world do we live in? A monster fish who *eats* people! Well I owe it to Rudi to eradicate those God-forsaken animals. Survival of the fittest, right? If they mess with our species, they've gotta go! I'll start a campaign to have each and every one of them slaughtered,' he ranted, and found himself pounding his fist into the grey flesh of the carnivore's head before it resumed its form as his study desk.

In the fleeting moments of joy that Kai did experience, he tasted a tinge of guilt at being able to still enjoy life. Why did Rudi's life get cut so short? And in such a dramatic way. How do we derive our sense of justice in a world that is so callously indifferent? People rushed off to work in traffic, oblivious to the mortality that knocked on their doors. These are the kinds of things he wanted to tell the press when they pressed him with their monotonous questions, but he composed himself to stick to the facts. He didn't want to talk about it to them, nor anyone else for that matter. Mother's innocent attempts to explore the pain just frustrated Kai with the inexpressibility of it. And Sonya? Forget Sonya! Where was she when he needed a loving touch? Girls and their games man, people and their games!

Soon he felt isolated and dull, like the world was a cardboard cutout and there was no real emotion in existence. How can we find true joy in this fleeting life? He passed the high schoolers walking home from school in their frivolous giggle mode, eyes glued to phone screens, attention glued to themselves. They were blissfully unaware of the vicious monster of an existence they're immersed in. His clenched hand scribbled poems in an attempt to get the poison out:

Death lurks like a perpetual shadow

There's never a day that it gives us a rest

Don't be fooled by the delight of a meadow -

in amongst the grass lies an appetite for flesh

He wanted to go back. He wanted another chance to get to Rudi before the cold ocean stole the final spark from his eyes. He wanted another chance to tell Rudi what a difference the quiet presence of his existence made in Kai's life. "Please Lord, make this a dream." It felt like a dream anyway, and if Kai could just have *one* chance to awake into a world that was colorful again, he promised God he would immediately seek Rudi out and express to him the love that everyone had been dead-endedly pouring into his grief proceedings.

Morning after morning he woke up with a cloud of grey weight pressing down on his smile. Little dark weights that tugged as his cheek bones like fish pulling down the remains of a dead carcass with their nibblings. There was one morning when he woke up and temporarily forgot. As he brushed aside the curtain next to his bed, (his family couldn't afford for him to have his own room so he had a designated corner of the lounge), he got a glamorous glimpse of

the gleaming grass before his mind was flooded with the memory of what he had experienced. His shoulders tensed. These solitary moments became the envy of every other.

Kai's prayer to wake up from his nightmare was never answered. Or if it was, then the answer was no. And the blurred line between these two possibilities became as equal of a concern as the desire for it to be a dream itself. What is *God's* role in all of this? Did he even believe in a God who could be so callous?

Sunday rolled around tied to its perpetual obligation to go to church. Kai had been going with Mother and Grandfather for the better part of 6 years. His brother used to go with them, but opted out irrevocably one day and enjoyed the weightlessness ever since. Kai wanted to make the same move, and was envious that his brother had got to it first. Because with one of them gone, neither would be able to bare the heartache that making Mother go without one of them would invite. Now Matt gets to surf while Kai entered the hour-long eternity known as mass.

Kai found himself 14 minutes into the eternity, painfully bearing the tedium. The monotonous tone of the priest's voice was as fittingly dull as the empty utterances from the crowd. Stone walls echoed the lifelessness Kai felt in these dead rituals. When he was 11 he used to be an altar server as a way of adding a little dynamism to the hour. These days he would prefer to be the *sacrifice* on the altar instead of the altar server.

Lately religion had become a get out of jail free card that Kai busted out whenever life threatened to lock him in its jaws. The first thought that sprung to mind when he had a gnarly wipe out surfing or he sensed the presence of a shark was 'Lord help me'. So in that respect Kai always had God in the back of his mind. But God is never content to be a background actor.

Unbeknownst to Kai, God's rise to Stardom was already commencing. At this particular moment, though, it was hard to see through the opaque ritualistic tedium.

Usually there was a hot girl who sat in the front left row who made the experience tolerable. They would always exchange glances during the communion procession and Kai would imagine the day that more than glances would be exchanged. But she wasn't there today, and Kai was deprived of this grand finale because life, under the direction of God Himself, insisted on eradicating even the smallest of indulgences from his meander.

In total there were maybe one or two of the Catholic songs that moved him, but today none of their digits graced the wooden hymnal number display. Rigid wood. Rigid chairs.

The congregation groaned its responses like a hypnotized mass inducing their own brainwashing. 'No wonder they believe this stuff, they repeat it in unison once a week for their entire existence. Do these people question the utterances that so unconsciously proceed from their trained tongues?' Up and down, up and down, sometimes on his knees. Kai noticed the common thread that this varying elevation bore to the emotional rollercoaster of life. Yet it was tamed by timing and rigorous recitations. Just like the illusion of order that rituals of life create.

This time, Kai prayed something besides his usual "Help me" prayer. But the dismissive words were a mere formality: "God please heal me. Please provide for me." Were they heeded?

The priest was talking about the beatitudes...the same beatitudes. Those lines of text that had been spoken about for years, decades, centuries, til the millennia drained the black out of the texts and they were as grey as the priest's melancholy tone as he mumbled on.

Paul. Something about having your mind renewed. Life can't be renewed. Once it's gone it's gone. Daydream...

CHAPTER 6: Synthetic Green Therapist

A few weeks into his pre-Life crisis, Kai remembered something that used to bring the color back to his world. He remembered an excitement and magic that rivaled any other, and it was time to bring that old friend out of the box.

Sweet Mary-Jane.

Kai had started smoking weed when he was 16 after a buddy in high school introduced him to it. His buddy liked to think of himself as avant-garde. You know the type: the 16 going on 40 guy who's all about culture and sophistication, who smirks at the ignorance of his fellow teenagers while graciously endowing them with undeserved snippets of his wisdom from his handle on this joke called life. A rationalist, an atheist, a reader. He was a friend, and if he smoked weed it can't be that bad.

Kai had taken on weed like a love affair. It started out with the thrill, rebellion, and newness. Soon it facilitated relationships, and then turned into one itself. It morphed into a social way to have out-of-this-world experiences with friends, where laughter and adventure overflowed their previously disenchanting realities. It was larger than life, and it was hard to believe how much Kai used to look forward to it sometimes.

After high school the crowd split like so many do, and that level of friendship became increasingly harder to find. The world set soul buddies on divergent paths. During his working holidays to Britain, weed became the common ground that mutually exclusive entities could stand on. It paved the way for friendships with everyone from British Chav gangsters, to Rastas

who used to know Bob Marley, as well as Camden Town punks, and Irish musicians. Similarly to alcohol, but involving more depth and subtlety, weed was a chance to shake the shackles of conventional stereotypes and view the world anew.

It was a girl that he traveled around with for a while who had shaken his relationship with weed a year ago. Menacing individual who finally convinced Kai to take a break from it. She did this partly out of a desire for control, partly out of jealousy at the recognition of a love affair with a (seemingly) inanimate object, partly out of misunderstanding about it, and a slim sliver to do with genuine concern for Kai's well-being. The fights about smoking had reliably ruined each trip, and Kai got over the drama. He ditched the weed for a few weeks to keep her happy, and then ditched her. He hadn't started smoking again, though, cos he was on his way home, and wanted to be on form when he arrived. Weed tended to make him lethargic and slow-witted.

But now he needed something to combat this depressed state. Weed had always helped him digest and reframe reality, providing an outside perspective on problems that Kai was too close to. Kai's flirts with death in the mugging incident and the oceanic jaw-miss had changed something about reality. He wasn't sure what, and he could certainly use some synthetic perspective on it. He had made up his mind: he was going to smoke again. Aristotle had said that happiness depends on ourselves, and old Jefferson had backed da brudda up by saying that a person is about as happy as he makes up his mind to be. Kai had decided to trust in the dead guys' testimonies and make himself happy.

The lingering anticipation of smoking brought an invigorating intensity to Kai's pulse while he assembled his paraphernalia in his backpack. He had successfully negotiated the alleys of Green Market Square the day before to purchase a parcel from a Rasta's stacked hat for R50. He had been duped before when trying to buy weed in London, instead walking away with a

luscious bundle of potpourri made from fragranced dried rose petals. Not the kind of pot he was looking for. He and his buddy had smoked it anyway to get their £10's worth. It tasted like burnt rip off. Surprisingly, the Capetonian dealers were fairly honest in their exchanges. And the honesty of his home-town druggies had endowed him with a green ticket to another reality, sitting neatly tucked away in the side pocket of his backpack.

The excitement was tangible as he and JP hiked through the deep green pine trees that filled their nostrils with the fresh odor of nature. The woods on the outskirts of the city were calm and yet vibrant with a latent sense of adventure. Half of the fun was looking for the perfect spot to smoke. Cape Town in the spring is a painter's color pallet brimming with African vitality.

The boys discovered a lively, dancing river that sang sweet serendipity to them. It was nature's way of leading the journey with her enchanted bread crumbs. By following the shushing stream, all the while dotting in and out of a conversation about the politics of girls, Kai and JP found the location. An overhanging Willow tree with emerald green tufts of grass invited them to a portal - destination expected, but never certain.

The exhilaration involved in the ritual of smelling, feeling, and then lighting the joint rivaled the best moments in surfing, and in fact life in general. Kai paused for a moment to imbibe the energy before imbibing the smoke.

A few heated breaths and involuntary coughs later, a warm familiarity began to set in. The customary heart pounding announced the advent of a different state of consciousness as the expanse between Kai and the surrounding trees became more vacant and tangible. His vision became clearer. JP's face morphed into what seemed like its untainted state – that of a dear

human friend who was known to the core of his being. Radiant eyes and held-back smiles burst into freeing laughter. Suddenly they shared a common breath, an unspoken brotherly intimacy. A different, more cerebral intimacy than the one that alcohol creates.

Kai soon got down to business, shaking off his mental excursions and honing in on the target: processing the shark attack. It seemed completely different now: tragic yet natural, a shortened cycle on a wheel we're all riding. Colorful. There was a glory in that kind of death that few get to inherit the legacy of. Acceptance. Rudi beamed down on the forest in transcendent peace. A peace that was contagious, and Kai felt serenity at last.

Weed had saved him. He had been reunited with a long lost acquaintance and wasn't about to lose her anytime soon.

PART 2: DIFFERENTIATED SPLIT

San Francisco, California – Kai's 22nd rotation around the sun

CHAPTER 7: The White Rabbit Rears his Head

Kai's green travel companion had become his bff, and had kept him company on journeys through mind and matter. After another 2-year series of sporadic working adventures in the UK, Chicago, and South Carolina, the guiding Forces continued their Westward pull and led him to San Francisco.

Why West? Historically the Western frontier has always represented the furthest quests of freedom away from the known Old World and towards something uniquely your own. Kai had noticed that the western coasts of multiple continents and countries bore this semblance.

But journeys away from inhabited territory cost cash as well as comfort, and at this particular point in Kai's venture he was running low on both. Almost out of money and living on a newfound friend's couch, he had just started taking catering gigs to fund the awe-inspiring succession of parties and surf sessions. Kai never stuck a job out for too long; they got boring fast. He still couldn't see himself in a conventional career, drained of his vitality. Traveling satiated his need for novelty, and he was feeling invigorated by the life and vibrancy of California.

Throughout human civilization, there have always been focal points at which culture was on the forefront of being created. In the 5th century BC, Athens was the place to be; in the 200 AD, Rome was where it was happening; all the cool kids were rocking London in the 1800's. And now, in the 21st century, *California* the spot! It was where global culture was being created, and Kai had wanted to be a part of it for as long as he could remember. Marijuana had just been legalized, and Kai was excited about the direction that Cali was leading the youth.

The idiosyncratic characters in Cali seemed to be his kind of people – laid back and animated, creative and friendly. Add to that girls galore, and seemingly easy ones at that, and Kai had reached the epitome of GPS coordinates according to his current way of functioning.

He loved America 'cos it was the only country where people were truly fascinated by the fact that he was foreign. The English didn't give two jolly well hoots. But here his accent was a passport to endless conversation, and a real asset when it came to seizing opportunities. *Carpe diem* – he seized many a chance, and many a girl!

One particular Tuesday, the salty morning air summoned him through the sliding screen door of his buddy's Jerry's house. Jerry had unknowingly returned Kai to his childhood living

situation by letting him exist out of a corner of the lounge. The beckoning of the outside world managed to overpower the perpetual lure of continued slumber. Kai got up and found that his brother was just waking up too.

Matt had joined him on the last leg of his Western crusade, and their joint awakening led them to hit the obligatory joint in the bathroom before beginning their careless surf escapade.

The familiar moist smell of plant engulfed them seconds before the tingles of altered consciousness did. While Matt smoked a cigarette outside after a satisfactory level of intoxication had been attained, Kai went back into the bathroom and caught a glimpse of himself in the mirror. He'd never looked this intently at himself before.

Ancient eyes looked back at him. 'What a strange creature you are... Look at these hands... Primitive claw-like protrusions. Why do you look so familiar? How can you be a meaningless animal? You've got aspects of *God* in you.' Kai sensed an intriguing urge to pray and, being one for following intuition, did.

"God please send your Holy Spirit into me and fill me with you." He'd heard his uncle pray like this before. It was an innocent enough request, and not the first time it had been made. But unbeknownst to Kai, something was different this time.

The prayer ended, and then it happened. Unexpectedly, grippingly, and yet naturally.

The room darkened around Kai's illuminated face in the mirror and a red, smoke-like light filled the air. It didn't seem too out of the ordinary and felt organic, wonderful. Alice hadn't noticed that the talking rabbit was strange initially. These preliminary effects lured Kai into thinking that anything was possible. He was 5 again and magic existed.

"One *can't* believe impossible things," Alice said.

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," replied the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Kai smiled with a pregnant buoyancy at the thought. His joy was ready to burst. And then it did. His mind's eye was flooded with a vision of fire coming down to embrace him and engulfing his being in its other-worldly glow.

Now this vision was of a type that we're all accustomed to, but seldom recognize. It's the spontaneous mental image of a loved one's face; a visual flash of the exit you need to remember to take while driving. Somewhat subjective, the experience was made all the more real by an objective surge of energy before the light bulb in the bathroom blew. Pop!

Darkness. But a vivid darkness. The room was full, and Kai was open. He felt more alive than he had in years. And he was gratefully perplexed.

It seemed like the experience was over. So he opened the door and decidedly resumed the mission of getting his wetsuit from the garage. 'Ooo this is gonna be an epic surf, I'm all revved up by like I've been infused with power.' He pushed open the heavy door of the garage. An old dog who had made his home there put every ounce of energy he had left in his fading body into dragging himself up off the floor and staggering over to greet Kai, the gentle hint of a wag present in his tail.

"Hello boy!" Kai had always been a sucker for dogs and their innocent and unconditional love. He felt compelled to minister to this dog, being in the sad and incapacitated state that it was in. Although since he was a teenager Kai shied away from hugging dogs

because of the smell they left on his clothes that could affect his chances of getting girls, he shook that ideology off with a vigor that the dog lacked and pressed his body into the dog's. The next sequence of events might not have happened if he wasn't willing to get dirty.

He was immediately glad of the decision he had made, as tangible happiness started flowing from the canine's body to his. Kai held the dog's head up toward his own and looked in his eyes. That's when he heard it.

Again, it wasn't an audible hearing, in the same way that the vision of the fire wasn't a visual seeing. But it was an unspoken understanding that was being communicated in the ether, or a recognition of an emotional statement in the dog's eyes. However you could describe it, the dog 'said' "This is nice."

Wait, what?! Kai jumped back at the assault to his worldview. The dog tilted his head to one side as if watching for Kai's next response.

"Did you just communicate with me?!" Kai barked the English words at the dog. The dog took a quick jump backwards himself, his age no longer weighing him down.

"No way, can you understand me?!" came the inaudible response from the dog. "Ok what is this?" the dog asked as he picked up a stuffed doll off the floor with his mouth. Just like the subjective nature of the fire vision made way to a more objective energy sense that something was really happening here, this interaction had just broken out of Kai's mind into tangible reality. The dog was actually outwardly responding to this interaction!

"That's a stupid toy doll thing!" Kai snapped, an increasing franticness in his voice.

"Ok what's this?" the dog asked as he put down the doll and picked up a ball.

“It’s a frieken ball!” Kai rushed the words out, mind progressively blown. At this the dog put down the ball and bounced around in a circle. Kai’s reality shattered in these instants, and his worldview crumbled like a teenager rediscovering that there *is* a Santa Clause. He switched into an alternate mode in a rather sudden exchange and all of the sudden the communication channel gushed into an ocean of understanding. A critical mass point in Kai’s consciousness had been reached. Was this the onset of the schizophrenia that had killed his father and caused his cousins to murder? Was the weed laced with LSD or something? Was this really *happening*?

If all the communication Kai had experienced in his life up to that point was as simplistic and linear as texting, now an HD-TV level of information began to pour into Kai’s consciousness. Instantly Kai was aware of the dog’s struggles, what life was like in that garage, the inevitable passageway toward death that the dog was embarking on, and how his owners were too consumed in their own existences to do much more than merely sustain his. It wasn’t a complaint, it was more of a heartbreaking testimony and it affected Kai deeply. Was this dog unique in that it could communicate? Is this a kind of Dr. Doolittle ability that Kai had just tapped into, with which he would be able to communicate with *all* animals? If this was all just a weed trip then how come nothing even remotely similar to this had happened in the 6 years he had been smoking? He couldn’t wait to find out the answers to these questions, and even the HD-TV stream of information couldn’t satiate his newly discovered and overwhelming fascination with this fresh reality he found himself inhabiting.

As if in answer to these questions, messages started filtering into his consciousness. Understandings. Conversations. He couldn’t wait to share this with his brother. And with that the garage door burst open as the universe delivered an affirmative response to his request. The

screaming that had ensued from Kai's excitability had startled Matt into thinking that Kai might be in trouble and he veered into the garage with a look of concern on his face.

"What's going on man?" he asked, poised for action.

"Matt check this out, oh my word, I can communicate with this dog!" Kai snapped loudly. He told the dog to sit and the dog obliged, all the while with a suspicious look on his canine face.

"Who is this?" the dog wanted to know.

"It's Matt, my brother, he's cool. Show him!"

But nothing. Like a dream in which you lose your voice when you need it the most, the dog refused to grant Kai this further substantiation of the objectivity of his encounter. Kai understood the dog's hesitancy, despite how disappointing it was, and led Matt out of the garage.

By this point the messages from other realms – these voices in Kai's head - were more tangible and audible, and began consuming more of his attention. So much so, in fact, that Kai could barely break a train of thought. He released himself in increments to their control as the possibility that these were just his own thoughts diminished in direct proportion to his inhibitions.

All the while Matt was dangling between panic and intrigue, not knowing what to do with this craziness that he had never seen in his brother before. Kai told Matt to take notes and remember all of this. He then proceeded to pace back and forth in the house, dictating both parts of the schizophrenic dialogue that was hijacking his consciousness. It wasn't a literal dialogue in

Kai's mind of course, as it was the same barrage of information and paradigm shifts that transcended regular communication like texting is inferior to the HD-TV.

"Who are you?"

"Evolved consciousness that doesn't have its origins on Earth. These are frequencies you are tuning into that have always been there, lying unperturbed by the passage of time, and rarely being tapped into because of your obsession with chryros."

"What is the point of all this?"

"It's an expansion of Life itself. You are evolving. You can no longer be content living in the dead things of the world – the manmade prisons that are material, psychological, and societal. The realm of magic that you thought was lost never was. You were. This is the realm of Fairy Tales. The reason you're drawn to them is because they are a subconscious memory and yearning for a world that's enchanted. Which is exactly what reality is."

"Why me?"

"You opened yourself up to it. You are learning that you're psychic."

"No way, I'm *psychic*! Yes! I always kinda knew that I was. Matt, I'm psychic man! You'll see!"

Kai grabbed Matt and hugged him with a voracity and urgency that he hadn't let out in years. All the societal obstacles and modes of interacting that had developed between the two during the times they had spent apart while each traveling the world with their separate agendas dissolved. Kai looked into his gaping blue eyes and saw straight into the soul of the little boy who had been his sidekick for their first decades of life. He realized how much more he had

missed him than the glimmers of his conscious mind allowed him to know, and *saw* him again for the first time in years. There was no stopping the flood of tears that poured forth the mingled emotions of relief and happiness at their reunion, and sadness and regret at the elapsed time span.

"I love you man, I've missed you" Kai gawked.

Matt all the while co-operated like the newly re-employed sidekick that he was. Kai's mom flashed through his mind's eye and he couldn't wait to talk to her. Kai began to think of all the special people in his life who now seemed like extensions of himself, like ligaments as opposed to the estranged entities in which he had become accustomed to viewing them in recent years.

He thought about Magda, the girl he was dating at the time. He now recognized the previously unobserved sadness in her entity. She was an aspiring artist from Prague in the Czech Republic, who lived in Haight Ashbury. Her mind was open but her heart was guarded. America bore a new kind of penetration that the externally closed societies of Europe didn't. Random conversations on the bus initiated by gregarious Americans activated her Czech suspicion, and so did Kai's seemingly untethered naivety. Her face looked back at him from his mind's eye, and he unconsciously reached into his pocket for his phone. As he lifted this manmade device to waist level it began to vibrate. It was Magda! He *is* psychic!

Kai answered the phone in an excited tone "Magda!"

"Kai?" came Magda's hesitant response.

"It's ok Magda, I want you to know how special you are."

Silence.

“Magda?”

“I’m here,” she admitted barely louder than a whisper, “it’s just weird that you say that ‘cos I’ve had a really rough day and Harry said that I don’t have what it takes to make it in the art world, and I was feeling anything but special.”

Her tone morphed into a whimper and Kai’s heart was opened even wider by his apparent reaching into hers.

“Uh, I’ve gotta go,” Magda shook herself free of this assault on the strong image she had worked so hard to project and reverted to her guarded, conditioned frame of mind. “Call me later k Kai, bye”.

Beeps replaced the humanity, but the humanity had just replaced the mundane beeps of previously artificial interactions. Kai let his hand fall from his ear with a sigh of bliss, his arms and shoulders releasing all the tension that he hadn’t realized had been there. He remembered the outside world, and surfing, and California, and it was almost too overwhelmingly euphoric!

He slid open the sliding door and burst out into the San Francisco air. As a flock of birds glided over him, he recognized that a split second earlier he had expected them to. Everything fit into its exact place, and the universe was perfect. *God.*

“Let’s go surf,” Kai beckoned to Matt, once again regaining enough rationality to resume living in this realm, “this is gonna be amazing! I feel like I can surf exactly like Parko if I just inhabit the right frame of mind.” He was brimming with so much energy that he wanted to be in the water this very instant. When his claw-like protruding feet touched the frigid Pacific water, he realized that the physical reality still bore immense powers of sensation. A seed of doubt was

sown. To his surprise, the waves didn't quite cooperate with him, as Mother Nature exerted her insistence that Kai was the transient one and was not in control.

The high wore off and the intensity of the experience faded, but Something had broken into Kai's reality. Something as or more pivotal than Rudi's death. And the world that he had just been birthed into was an entirely different place than the one he had inhabited in the womb of yesterday. Maybe life *can* be renewed!

Kai was an oyster whose shell had been yanked right off! He had access to the entire ocean of the spiritual. And every creature, from clown fish to sharks, had access to him.

CHAPTER 8: THE RABBIT HOLE is a Confusing One-Way Street

CHAPTER 8.1 The Rabbit Hole – Looking into It

Days passed, then weeks. Nothing could shake Kai's mind from the enchanted forest of a world that he had just woken up to. A veil had been lifted from his eyes, and then put back on in a translucent state so that Kai could only make out shadowed memories and vague inclinations about the realm of hidden meaning that lay latent beneath sociological San Francisco.

He knew something drastic had dawned on him but he wasn't sure what. Was it Truth? Was it psychosis? He lived for another glimpse of the 20-20 vision that his mystical encounter had exposed him to, his subconscious all the while digesting what he had newly absorbed.

The only thing Kai could think to do was to research. When faced with decision to make, his lifelong indoctrination in the systems of education up to this point had endowed him with their motto: read what other people have learnt. He was a good little scholarly boy. Research was in fact the way he approached most choices in life, beneath the veneer of spontaneity.

So he voraciously dove into Googling these phenomena in order to ground himself in what was out there, wearing away the letters on his laptop keyboard with his incessant finger stomping. After joining the library, his library card resided in the front spot in his wallet. It was the passport that allowed individual personalities to leap across history and continents to meet him in books. Living in America, this was the first time that he had unrestricted access to the internet, and the two huge worlds of the internet and spirituality intersected seamlessly and overwhelmingly.

His reading and searching began generating instant feedback. He was surprised, and yet not, to discover that this realm he'd been exposed to had been discovered by countless other people throughout history – important people...cos they were dead. This made his experience seem all the more objective.

Objective, yes. This reality was out there alright. But clear? No! The thing was, his experience fit into a number of categories, a number of seemingly contradictory categories. An identity crisis started to gnaw at him. What had happened to him, and what did that say about who he was?

For instance, a lot of his experience aligned with schizophrenia. He had known that it was rampant on his dad's side of the genetic tree, but had never thought twice about it. Had weed unleashed a tantalizing insanity? There certainly did seem to be a lot of similarities

between schizophrenia and his newfound lenses. Was it really that much fun being crazy? He must remember to ask these San Franciscans. He loved that he was in a place that welcomed counter-cultural insanity! The city of mist and sun and hippies was an apt place for Kai's hazy view. Perhaps he was balancing on the brink of being as Bipolar as the weather. His episode certainly seemed manic, but there was no depressive bounce-back. And is schizophrenia just a sustained manic episode?

But another possibility was even more intriguing: his experience was also completely valid as a genuine mystical encounter. The great psychologist William James researched this stuff reputedly and vigorously, and his 4 requirements for the mystical state were ticked immediately: Kai's incident:

- “1) could not be adequately expressed in words,
- 2) was imbued with illuminations, revelations, [and was] full of significance and importance [with a] sense of authority for after-time,
- 3) was transient and only lasted about 30 minutes, and
- 4) was orchestrated by a superior Power beyond Kai's control.”

Was he going mad, or was he a saint in the making? Lunatic or mystic...apparently the same thing made them 'tic'. And who said these two possibilities mutually exclusive anyway? Schizophrenics used to be revered in ancient societies as oracles. Maybe schizophrenia was a portal into a realm that does exist (perhaps in the subconscious), but that if permanently inhabited reaps havoc on functioning in our linear society.

But then again, maybe dat was just some gooood chronic weed! He was, after all, on *drugs*! But why had it never happened before, and if it was laced or something, then why didn't it happen to Matt even though he smoked the same stuff? What is it that drugs expose us to anyway? William James didn't dismiss encounters initiated by substance:

“The next step into mystical states carries us into a realm that public opinion and ethical philosophy have long since branded as pathological, though private practice and certain lyric strains of poetry seem still to bear witness to its ideality. I refer to the consciousness produced by intoxicants and anesthetics, especially by alcohol.”

In fact, Kai discovered, there was a whole different class of humanity who was saturated with a mystical worldview. Madam Blavatsky and the writings of the esoteric spiritualists resonated to an exact pitch with the exposure Kai had been granted. He was entranced by the complexity with which these realms were described in their writings, all articulated using matter of fact language. The existence of the astral plane, for instance, which was one level above the physical, connected the gaps between a few of his dotted understandings.

The astral plane is a realm that we inhabit during dream time, and can also be accessed in near death experiences or other types of OBE's. These journeys could be triggered by certain types of meditation. Time and space don't exist in that plane like they do in the physical, which began to make Kai think about the afterlife and how very abstract our concept of time is.

You can't understand a computer game from within the game itself. During his mystical encounter, and even vaguely before that, it had made sense to Kai that time wasn't like we thought it was. Now it seemed his research was confirming that past, present, and future are just the mind's way of organizing consciousness into digestible chunks. But what were the

implications of this? There were just too many possible tangents to explore. And external time still had a deathly grip on Kai's physical existence.

The outside world and the perpetual demands it makes on a person's time were wearisome to Kai, and bordered on the point of being too much to bare. Even making food was pushing the limit of the energy he was willing to put into sustaining his physicality. Anything that was a mandatory requirement of everyday life felt as tedious as being forced to alphabetize names of the entire world population after just meeting your soul mate. Abandoning *bourgeois culture* definitely entailed *forgetting grandiose homelife!*

Why isn't *everyone* looking into this? He figured that most people are probably put off exploring this path less traveled by the incessant busyness that chasing material satisfaction requires. It's a form of distraction that pulls us away from the inner world. It is welcomed by far too many, not the least of which being Lucifer himself, as the King of the Air smiles at our postmodern zombiehood.

Even at this point Kai knew that Satan wasn't a red chap with an antiquated agricultural pitchfork, but that his seeds are sown in much subtler, and even ostensibly glorious, ways. Despite the apparent allure of the mythical Faun's fruit, Kai was intent on sticking to the nutrition of his Value tomato paste, the Queen of Hearts of the fruits. But little did he know that a New Age organic germination was embedding its imbibing roots within his naïve psyche. Trojan equestrian entrance. Satan had been playing the game much longer than he had.

'Maybe I'll go smoke in Golden Gate Park,' he thought one afternoon, "this hermit-hood can't be good for me.' He opened the door of his studio as a child tests a pool of water to see how cold it is, and the frigid winter air bit him. 'San Francisco sucks in winter', he moaned to

himself, 'I've gotta get outa here on a bigger scale.' Someone far off shouted something through the wind. He heard it so clearly though, that it was like the words were coming from somewhere within him. "India," it said. "Ah, ah, ah..." the echo faded away. He shut the door, as well as his idea of venturing out there. It was a home kinda day. Finally the flame kissed the tufts of green magic and Kai's head began to expand. 'I'm back,' he thought. 'Maybe some meditation is in order.'

Meditation was a commonly recommended thread among the branches of his rapidly ascending tower of knowledge. It was acclaimed as the nutrition of the budding psychic. Apples, meditation, figs. The list of breath-work's proponents was too staggering to not think about it: Buddhism, Hinduism, avant-garde New Agers, Oneironaut dream explorers, bendy Yogis, bald Christian monks, popular psychics, John Lennon, girlfriendy Magda, Oprah. Now who can argue with the circular entity of the big O? No one can escape a circular mandala.

Kai had been haphazardly meditating since he was 15, but now he digested meditation like pasta to a growing boy. Yes peace and healing were great, mindfulness: lovely, but his primary objective was to advance his psychic functioning. And the primary objective behind *this* was the advancement of his ego. All he had to do was yank open that third eye chakra. Kai had a gleam in his eye as he imagined how epic it would be to rock his psychic abilities to the amazement of his friends! Only problem was, he didn't seem to have too many of those these days.

CHAPTER 8.2 The Rabbit Hole – Sucking Kai's Relationships In

Virtual contact was virtually his only form of contact with the outside world. This was a blessing and a curse: it allowed him the time to dive into this hermit bubble whole-heartedly, but prevented him from sharing these incredible discoveries, or bumping them up against rationality.

The hours of frantically excited research isolated Kai more and more. Matt had left for South Africa to surf competitions and left Kai detached from his roots. He shunned all invitations from his friends to leave his solitary bubble even though inwardly he longed for someone who was of his species to share these things with. But no one seemed as obsessively interested in this thing called Reality as Kai was.

See the common folk that Kai conversed with would seem to enjoy talking deep, especially after a shared joint or on the tail end of a night of guzzling hops and barley. But their concentration would waver and their knowledge about things esoteric was limited. People could only be well-versed in *so* many subjects given our finite time. Their laser beam of focus was too broadly dispersed on other things to be of any penetrating power in spiritual subjects. Conversations would inevitably begin leaning toward more secular topics. Even though many a thoughtful extrapolation of these topics interested Kai, his interest was only due to them being concrete manifestations of more shadowy truths. Carl was the deepest of his buddies, and Kai did sometimes enjoy their after-work joint sessions.

Unbeknownst to Kai, the joints weren't the only thing on fire - his relationship with Magda was in the process of burning to the ground. When you're consumed in the smell of joint smoke, you don't smell the smoke of the fire. In the end, it's the smoke that kills.

Back in the day, Kai had tossed aside the chance to be honest with Sonya in a desire for, contradictorily, control and freedom. Now that he was learning the power of truth, he chose to

take the diametrically opposite approach with Magda by being blatantly honest...all the time...about everything. Dualism is the name of the game in Hegel's second phase - either, or. 'Either deceive, or be callously honest,' Kai thought, 'Those are the only two options. So I'll do what's right and be honest.' But life is neither black, nor white...nor grey for that matter. Kai was still earning his colors.

Gone were the days of using his monistic hues to paint a façade of the type of guy he thought girls would be attracted to, and then play hard to get. Time to let his true hue glow. He figured that if a girl didn't like him for who he was then there were others out there who would. He had enough insight to predict the burdensome long-range effects of getting a girl to fall for a short-term façade instead of his core. Embarking on a long term journey wearing a costumed disguise would inevitably lead to decreased vision, uncomfortableness, and an unnecessary weight. The sum of which equals ugliness. Kai's growing self-confidence allowed him to take a chance, and had laid his dreams, fears, and battles on the line with Magda.

In learning to speak the truth in love, like the Bible said to do, Kai was getting the truth part down, but always speaking it with *love* was trickier. When the love was reciprocal then it was easy to nail that too, but at the slightest hint of attack on his ego, he would bust out his sword.

Initially the truth-telling approach had catapulted their intimacy, despite her reserve caused by her introverted Czech culture and Kai's nonconventional honesty. But that didn't last long. Kai found words coming out of his mouth that he never would have deemed possible. But he was sure that he was right, about all of them. Anyway, his uncontrolled, harsh voice wasn't that shocking to Kai. After all, in line with Alice's exclamation, "so many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that [Kai] had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible."

Something sinister was seeping through. If Kai stopped to think, he may believe that, behind his conscious screen, he was still doing battle with the rotten egg of stubbornness that had been laid in his childhood. And that now the fight had extended to the offspring it had hatched: the growing dragon of pride. This adolescent dragon was well into his teenage years by now, and was proving to be helpful at times, replacing the feeble lack of self-confidence of Kai's early teens. The dragon had been receiving growth spurts through the knowledge that Kai was gaining, as well as through Kai's grandiose identity as One Who Had Been Chosen. Like any good dragon teenager, this demon of pride knew everything (including the knowledge that he knew everything!) It was *this* voice, he may think, that was emerging.

Wherever this voice was coming from, Kai's tactless expression of a few of his prized opinions (that he was quickly developing about every subject under that burning mass called the sun) was what ultimately set fire to their relationship, charring it to ashes. Kai had told Magda what she should do; Magda had not agreed in Kai's point of view; Kai had thought she was turning against him; Magda turned against him.

Kai was shocked by Magda's ungrateful response to the wisdom with which he had generously endowed her. Her silence was presumed by Kai to be a period of reflection on the depth of his insight and character. So Kai played the role of any effective discipliner, giving her time to think about what she had done. She thought for the next few years.

Another one lost. But at least Kai was finding himself, he reassuringly thought. Girls and their need for constant communication take up too much time anyway.

As for his buddies, well paths diverge. He hadn't called JP in months. Guys don't do too well with long distance friendships, he had noticed. Nevertheless, the moment they saw each other again he was sure things would be the way they had always been.

Kai wasn't lonely though. In the past being with a girl had made him feel complete. Now, although girls like Sonya and Magda were distant memories of what could have been, he was engaged to Miss Jane. Oh Mary made him feel fantastic! And the incessant internal monologues she initiated provided ample social interaction. Contrary to his character, he had no problem committing to her as his fiancé. Little did he know that she was already taking more than half of his stuff. But the delicious apples of knowledge she kept offering Kai lured him like an eternal Adam. With knowledge came power.

CHAPTER 8.3: The Rabbit Hole – A Whole Lotta Reality

Whether it was the light or the dark that was manifesting its power, Kai was unsure, and never did really figure out. But regardless of its source, the spiritual realm came bursting into Kai's life with a pompous display of its tangibility. Little synchronicities proceeded to confirm the reality of it time and time again until it became indisputable.

His intuition conspired with reality to present him signs. Almost every time he looked at a clock it said 11:11. One time the clock's batteries had run out...at 11:11. Day after day he woke up 1 minute before his alarm went off...for 2 weeks straight. No matter what time the alarm was set for. How was his consciousness responding to time like this? This particularly confused Kai because of how the dream realm didn't operate on Chronos time. His dreams were a prime example of the blurring between the subjective and objective that was seeping into Kai's life.

His dreams consistently predicted who was going to contact him the next day, even if he hadn't heard from the person in years. He didn't mention it to them though; he wasn't quite ready to plaster a loony label on his sweaty forehead.

Trying an online tutorial on how to see auras, Kai couldn't believe his eyes when he saw the faint blue mist cloud surrounding the orange cardboard he had set up against the opposite wall. All he had to do was look beyond the cardboard for long enough.

Kai devoured the Bible. Never before had the words resonated with his soul so profoundly. It was uncanny how he could read the same Scripture on different days, and it could speak insight into his exact situation. It seemed to have levels upon levels, and mystery upon mystery. He couldn't fathom its depth.

One evening, while attempting to hear from God by randomly playing songs on his iPod, searching for messages in the lyrics, the Bible opened all by itself! A flabbergasted Kai watched from across the room. He shut the music off and looked back at the Bible. It was still open. The sound of the AC continued to moan; Kai held his breath. He looked towards the window. Was it the wind? It was open, but the wind could never have been strong enough to do that! He shuffled over to the book, feeling the flimsy pages in his hands, and reading what was written on the page that had been flung open: "Do not put the LORD your God to the test as you did at Massah." (Deuteronomy 6:16). Electric tingles!

Could the Bible speak to him like *that*? Maybe it could! It occurred to him that this was the strategy that had converted the Great Saint Augustine. He closed the hard-covered Book and opened it randomly, trying to get far away from the page he had just read. His thumbs drew

apart the pages and his eyes fell straight on Luke 4:12: "Jesus answered, 'It is said: "Do not put the Lord your God to the test."'"

Woooah! Kai slammed the book shut and pressed his back up against the far wall, breathing heavily. God? *GOD is here!* This transcendent Being is communicating with *KAI!* Can this be real?!

What is real anyway? The line between subjectivity and objectivity blurred even more thoroughly, like a drunken conversation between realms.

Suddenly one night, Carl Jung slung his arm around Kai's shoulders in a calm vivid dream. Without moving his lips, he conveyed his Swiss-accented message.

'I vas where you are - inhabiting two realms...in ze simultaneous fashion. I almost had ze breakdown because of zit. But zis realm you're experiencing now, zit turn out to be real! My dreams were premonition of World War 2. It's a journey – but it's *your* journey, vith meaning for *you!*'

Kai hadn't known much about Jung. He woke up from his dream intent on changing that. Eager eyes scanned the white screen, finding validation in his dream's claim that Jung had predicted the World War! Except dream Jung said he had foreseen **WWII**, but real-life Jung had visions of **WWI**! Kai found this bewildering; his dreams appeared to grant him fallible shadows of real knowledge. He was gaining a kind of power here! But he was also losing power, and fragments of himself.

The first inclination of a shadow side of these abilities arrived in the mail. An envelope addressed to Kai. No one sent Kai mail. His warm breath stopped for a minute as he pulled out a business card from a pastor. White lettering on a black background sent him to a web address

where he could download sermons. He listened to the first one on the list immediately. It was grimly entitled "Dead like a Dodo," and was about the resurrection of the dead. It was eerily relevant to the things Kai had been reading about recently. It quoted names, places, Bible verses, something about Nineveh. Kai turned it off and looked at the website again. The whiteness of the screen hurt his eyes. It hurt his brain. It shot through to some dormant, asleep side. Kai blacked out...and woke up in a park.

CHAPTER 8.4: The Rabbit Hole – It's Dark in Here

The first thing to return to Kai was his feeling. The coldness of a concrete bench pressed up rough against the back of his head. Pain shot through to his eyes when he tried to inch them open. It subsided, and he opened them again.

The shadow of a homeless guy slunk away from Kai. Why had he been over near him? His vision stayed faded as he swung his feet around towards the floor. They sank into thick mud. Goo oozed through five toes. He was missing a shoe. He pried them from their sinkhole and shook his head to snap himself out of his stupor.

'Where am I? Some park, I guess.' His vision was filled with grey shadows. His hands were grey, he remembered nothing. 'How the...what?' Panic set in. What had happened to him? Had he been abducted?

He was starving! His mouth was dry with the aftertaste of fish. Damn mud. His hair was caked in mud too. He had to get outa there.

Trees overhung him, whispering their sinister shadows in through his head. "Stormsssssss," one seemed to say. He started jogging. He fell in rhythm with his legs. If only the presidents would stop spying on him, he could get somewhere. The queen would...wait, what was he thinking about?

"Help a brother out with some change," said another vagabond. Kai ignored him, sprinting now. He heard the roar of cars in the distance and when his eyes fell upon the fluorescent red glow of Haight Street's store lights, he felt relief as if he was returning home from a foreign land. He could get home now. He sunk his hands into his pockets to feel if he had any money for a bus. Bare.

Ordinary citizens were now subtly looking at his muddy feet, one shoe on, one shoe off. 'This must be what it feels like to be a homeless person,' he thought. The graffiti murals enclosed him in a world of empathy. Their bright colors and meaningful messages resonated with Kai to the extent that he felt that he was there *with* the artists who had painted them, sharing in their struggles, wanting to communicate their message.

He shook his head. He had been zoning out in front of a mural of a monkey. Groups of late-night partiers were hollering up the street. What day was it? When had he left? The last thing he could remember was it was Wednesday. Right? Ya, he had got home from shift and answered that phone call from Abraham's beard, and then picked up that business card. The business card - that was the last thing he remembered.

He started walking in the direction of home, thumb stuck out. No one wanted to give the muddy guy a ride though. His thoughts raced as he tried to retrace his steps.

Nothing.

Cold shot up his bare foot now. And he felt pain too. Had he been bare foot the whole night?

Finally he came to the BART terminal just as a tram was about to take off. He casually slunk on the back carriage amongst another crowd of rowdy party goers.

“Dude, best night ever!” said a goth-looking teen. Most of the rest of the carriage was empty. It must be late. The youth's words passed straight through Kai, painfully amplified. He wished he would shut up. But he didn't.

“Are you coming to church tomorrow?” he asked his sloppy compadre.

What a joke, the two of them in church! If God wanted to save...

‘Wait, *church?* As in *Sunday!* That means I've lost *three days!*’

His throat pulsed with his heart. He began shaking violently. It was noticeable. It was uncontainable.

“Hey man, are you ok?” the Goth asked.

“You're fine, greecham,” was all Kai managed to grunt. The BART grinded to a halt and Kai made for the door, stumbling on the way out. He began running again. Trash cans lined the street and the sun was starting to come up. He needed to go to a doctor. He was sick. He was...

His front door was wide open. He huffed in relief that everything was still there. In South Africa he would have been robbed blind if he was gone *three* minutes! Thank you Lord for America!

The long shower washed away his shivers. He ravaged the fridge, leaving noodles all over the floor of the kitchen he shared with another guy. He'd clean it tomorrow. This was a desperate situation.

Despite the shivers subsiding, his body was still pulsing with energy when he pulled the curtains tight to try and shut out the morning light. Now that he was home he... felt *great!* He felt powerful, all-knowing! Was he a saint or a prophet?

He wanted to share this with people. But he was also frightened. What added to the questions, and the anxiety, was that he couldn't find any trace of the pastor's business card – no card, no envelope in the trash, no search history in his browser. He was sure now that weed was opening up delusional realities. He had to stop. He vowed to stop smoking weed right there and then. What had he done in the blacked-out period? Could he have committed any crimes, done drugs, had unprotected sex, hurt himself? This wasn't right. He knew this wasn't normal.

But also, he *was* gifted. He *was* chosen. If he told people and sought help, then society would label him mentally ill and subdue his calling with Valium and anti-psychotics. The medical field was governed by the powers and principalities of the world, of the air. They don't want people subverting the norm. He began worrying about his search history on his laptop. They could trace his IP address. They were probably aware that he had become powerful recently. He was going to have to be more careful. Who else could know about all this? He could think of no one. He wished with a longing heart for a kinsman to share his plight. I guess there was Carl.

CHAPTER 8.5: The Rabbit Hole – And One of Its

Inhabitants

Carl was Kai's smoking buddy from the catering gig, and seemed more attuned to Kai's wavelength than most. He was Bay born and raised, and the area's open-mindedness permeated the life he lived. He seemed to live it like an artform, a song sung to himself (and occasionally others in his rough open mic night gigs). He was the offspring of two pioneering hippies who were prominent in the Haight Ashbury surge of the 60's, and had carried their free-spirited DNA into the modern (or post-modern) ambience of the SOMA district. He had tried most drugs, and you could tell. His faded clothes were haphazardly strewn along his scrawny figure. And he always wore a hat – berets, top hats, beanies, and the occasional baseball cap. He said his hats were yet another word that helped him in his freedom of expression. Born in March, his birthday always missed the Spring Equinox by a hair.

His eyes looked out with a wide-mooned dilation, absorbing his world with a half-second delay. His speech mirrored his lifestyle – slow, colorful, and strung out.

As a free thinker, he prided himself on being nonjudgmental. He never judged anyone...except people who asserted their right to judge. Kai never ventured so far as to point out the inherent contradiction there, despite their fast-growing rapport. Carl's candid openness during the joint sessions with Kai had fast-tracked him on the friendship path, and Kai enjoyed bouncing ideas off of him, because they bounced back with a flower powered spin. One night after their shift Carl and Kai sat on a bench under the moonlight to bounce a joint, and joint ideas.

“Dude I’m not gonna smoke for a while. But you go ahead, I’ll chill with you.” Kai said.

“You what brah? What on this forsaken planet could make you say such a thing?” Carl asked.

“Ah nothing really man, I’ve just got this drug test coming up for a health plan I wanna get on, and I’ve gotta keep it cool for a bit. But I’m stoked to be here man, in fact I’ve been wanting to let you in on my alter ego.” Kai said.

Carl smiled with a closed mouth. He had already sparked the joint. He was open to hearing Kai’s story, although he frequently got side-tracked. So Kai had opted to let him into his enchanted land, to test the social waters and see how people would respond to these ventures he was taking.

“Carl I’m telling you dude,” Kai continued, “this stuff I’m getting into is insane! So many amazing things to ponder; I can’t get enough of it! It’s like sucked me into this kaleidoscope and I feel like... Alice or something. Alice in PonderLand.”

“Haha, Alice!” Carl chuckled with closed eyes. He paused with a smirk on his face. “Alice is in *chains* maaan, she can’t get out of her *mind*.” He let the words draw themselves out, animatedly gripping his head in exclamation.

Kai grinned knowingly; he could relate.

“Ya and neither can I bru. That reminds me of something I wanted to tell you about. Have you ever heard of lucid dreaming?”

Kai had stuck to his decree to stop smoking weed, but without it needed some other intriguing pursuit to take him out of dull reality. He had poured himself into learning how to have lucid dreams, and was having about one a week.

“Lucid dreaming...I have!” Carl proclaimed, finger pointing toward the sky in triumph. “Never done it though,” he confessed. “Had this whacked trip with a homey of mine who was hella into it. But the guy tripped so hard that night that I never got to tap his brain about what’s involved. Speak forth!” Carl made a sweeping, open-handed gesture, beckoning Kai to elaborate.

“Well I’m still getting the hang of it man, but so far it’s one of the trippiest things I’ve ever experienced! You teach yourself to realize that you’re dreaming *while* you’re dreaming. And once you know you’re in a dream, the dream itself becomes as real as *this*,” Kai insisted, sliding his hands over the bench they were sitting on. The moonlight that illuminated the harbor wall, and the towering Bay Bridge that adorned their view at that moment seemed pretty real. It was almost hard for Kai to believe his own words, and he wouldn’t have if he hadn’t *been* there. He couldn’t wait to tell Carl about his ventures in these other planes, but he wanted to teach Carl how to open up the realm for himself first; as if Columbus paused on his return voyage from America to give directions to a fellow expeditioner. There is a real mutual brethernood between consciousness expeditioners.

“Dude I’ve gotta tell you about some of the things I’ve seen there, but first do you wanna know how you get there?” Kai was on the verge of launching uncontrollably into a verbal diahorrea session, but had enough composure to check Carl’s interest level first.

“Speak forth,” Carl said again. Kai beamed involuntarily, noticeably relieved to get permission to proceed.

“K so check it out: in the dream realm there is no such thing as time or space, right, which is one of the things that makes me think that dying might have some similarities with it. But that’s a different tangent. So one of the ways you can figure out you’re dreaming is by scrutinizing watches, ‘cos the construct they supposedly measure isn’t real over there.” He paused to analyze Carl’s expression. He seemed to be tracking so Kai continued. “So for the past 2 months in my waking reality I’ve programmed myself to look at my watch twice every time I check the time. I look away after the first time, and then check back to make sure that nothing weird is happening. You might have seen me.”

Carl pulled his mouth and gave a small shake of the head, then raised his eyebrows as if to say continue, or more likely “speak forth.”

“It’s hard to notice trippy stuff in a dream ‘cos even weirdness seems normal there. Like Alice dude, she didn’t even notice that a talking rabbit in a waistcoat was strange until she saw that he had a watch. Come to think of it man, a watch, *time!*

“Anyway, as soon as you realize you’re dreaming dude, you’ll freak out. It’s hard not to get too excited, and I revved myself up too high the first couple of times. But that wakes you up.”

Kai wasn’t sure what side of Carl manifests in the Astral Plane – his chill druggie side, or his mad excitable side.

“There’s stuff you can do to stay in the dream though. Like I learned that spinning around in a circle locks you in it for a little while so that you’re free to explore. Dude,” Kai

raised his eyebrows and put his hands out as if he was nonverbally reiterating that he was dead serious, "once you come out of the spin you literally land in this tangible realm. You can *fly*; you can taste food exactly the way you would in waking reality...you can have sex with anyone you want!" Kai knew that last line would be a selling point for Carl.

And he was right, as Carl flung his head back in jubilant reaction to his imagination and yelled, "Yes sir! Sign me up!"

"For sure man, you'd love it! You can also rock telekenesis. And listen to this: I've met, I mean full on *met*, frieken *Mermaids* and *Gnomes*!"

"Mermaids and gnomes, moohahaha," Carl cracked up again, repeating Kai's words in a drawn out tone. "That is far out holmes! I've always had a crush on Ariel, I'll kill two birds with one stone yo!"

Kai grinned widely, "Oh yeeeah!" He wasn't sure how seriously Carl was taking him. For the meantime he was content that at least he was humoring him instead of shutting him down. Kai was having a grand old time anyway, and this was amping him up. Plus he sensed by something in Carl's body language, or maybe it was something in his eyes, that he took Kai more seriously than he was letting on.

Kai remembered the mermaid encounter vividly, and probably always will. He was walking along a rocky outcrop into the ocean. About half a mile out, he was bordering on lucidity and spun himself coherent to see a pair of hazel eyes gleaming up at him, tucked behind cresting peaks of choppy water. Her light orange curly hair had flecks of blonde cascading through it. It looked unkempt and shared little in common with Ariel's.

Kai had dived hastily into the water in her vicinity, literally leaping at the chance of a closer encounter. She was clearly fascinated with him too. He found himself breathing underwater, as was typical in his dreams, staring lucidly out into the murky grey-blue. The water gurgled its song around him.

She appeared like lightning two arms' lengths away from his face. He gasped in oxygenated water. Staring intently into his eyes for a captivating moment, Kai felt bewitched. Her gapped teeth made her look like a hick, her hair waved in hypnotizing slow motion. Then she scurried away like a fish that had been reached out for.

Kai had pondered long and hard about this experience, especially the surprisingness of her bad teeth. If she was a subconscious manifestation of his ideas of mermaids, then why the teeth? Was all this purely make believe? Where did the idea of mermaids originate anyway?

The gnome experience was enchanting too. It bore the same uncanny naturalness that made it hard to believe it was a product of his imagination. Kai was engaged in small talk in a Hobbit-like setting that felt as if it was a couple of hundred years in the past. Wrapped up in the dream, he glanced around at the stone outcroppings of burrow-like houses nestled amongst the deep green rolling hills. It felt like a lunch break on a construction gig, and little clusters of worker men were chatting harmlessly in the midday sun. Nothing seemed strange at first; his vision fell across the gnome softly and unobtrusively.

He had seemed about as normal as a Mexican is in a group of white folk, no more out of the ordinary. His height gave him away, although he was bigger than Kai had imagined a gnome would be. He came up to his human co-workers' shoulders and was no less of an animation than they were. Dull skin and bone just like Kai was.

As Kai headed over to further investigate, lucidity dawning, he noticed the gnome's tattered, soil-smeared brown trousers falling loosely on worn clog shoes. He appeared to be in his early 60's, adorning the characteristic grey beard, and with wrinkled skin that spoke of adventures every bit as real as the ones we experience in this realm. A chalky green, rough textured coat hung down just short of a leather belt that squeezed him like cookie dough.

As Kai approached, excited and increasingly bewildered, the group of guys stopped talking and looked in Kai's direction. Kai's vision was fixed on the gnome, whose button brown eyes slit in growing suspicion as Kai approached. Face wrinkling, the message was, "Can I help you...(you freak)?" Kai woke up with a gaping jaw.

He wished he could express all this to Carl, but how can you convey such realistic experiences in terms that don't sound childish or ludicrous?

"Lucid dreaming huh?" Carl paused and nodded. "I buy it. I'm gonna try that man 'cos it sounds a lot like a free acid trip! Mermaids...that makes me think." His facial expression took on a more serious aura as he let his stoned smile subside. "Brah mermaids have been in our collective consciousness since like Ancient Assyria. Even frieken Christopher Columbus saw 'em ladies cruising the Caribbean shores! You know bro, I almost feel like people in the past were more permeable to the veil that separates us from those mythical, magical kinda trips." Now Carl was talking! He know his stuff. And even more affirming, he *had* been taking Kai seriously! "Yeaah man," he continued, drawing the words out slowly, somber now, "what if the common denominator between like dreams, and drugs bro...and meditation, and all that kinda stuff, is this actual *place*? Like a land where we rub shoulders with the world of the subconscious. Maybe I'm just mad, but I know others who are madder."

Kai's mind began simultaneously clicking various trains of thought together: Jungian collective unconscious and archetypes; Vísir's 1998 survey that found that 54% of Icelanders believed in elves; Plato's theory of forms and mythology; mutual dreaming. He had to let Carl know about mutual dreaming, 'cos that discovery was a paradigm-shifter for him.

"Ya well that actually makes sense bru 'cos you know what else? You can have these *mutual* dreams where people arrange to meet up and can share an experience in Dreamland. Then they can independently verify details about the dream when they wake up! How crazy is that? I mean a lot of their imagery varies, I guess it's like you say, huge parts of that realm are manifestations of the subconscious, but from their account man it's pretty obvious that they have real shared experiences. Which means that the dream world is *out there*. It's not just our brain working through the experiences of the day like most people think. Although there's a lot of that too."

"I've been to that place man," Carl said matter-of-factly. "It's called Vegas! Naa just pulling yo chain man, I mean I've been there cos drugs are an instant ticket to that place." His hippy friend paused and shook his head slightly as he looked up at the stars. "That place... you know, you should do shrooms man, I know this guy who can get some killer stuff." And Kai knew the conversation had gone back to a more conventional topic. Kai didn't mind though, drugs interested Kai too, especially after learning about Tim Leary and South American spiritual rituals. Even old Willy James validated these experiences by saying:

"I know more than one person who is persuaded that in the nitrous oxide trance we have a genuine metaphysical revelation. It is that our normal waking consciousness, rational consciousness as we call it, is but one special type of consciousness, whilst all about it, parted from it by the filmiest of screens, there lie potential forms of consciousness

entirely different. We may go through life without suspecting their existence; but apply the requisite stimulus, and at a touch they are there in all their completeness, definite types of mentality which probably somewhere have their field of application and adaptation.”

The temptation towards drugs harder than weed had been pulling at Kai for years, and had recently grown exponentially. He knew himself too well though; he knew he'd enjoy it too much. And he knew all too well what desperation addiction can reap.

His dad was an alcoholic and drug addict, and his suicide happened in the midst of a substance-induced schizophrenic episode when Kai was 18. What made the tragedy even more gut-wrenching was that he did it a year before Kai was planning on going out to Canada to live with him. Kai still believed he could have made a difference, he could have changed him. Although in actual fact the difference would probably have been in the opposite direction. Many a time Kai had encountered his dead dad in dreams - sometimes across a large lake; sometimes a few minutes gone from each spot Kai went to; often separated from Kai by the glass of some rehabilitation institution. His death had put him perpetually out of reach, and forced Kai to invent his own ideas of what it means to be a man. Which was a ying yang situation to be in.

One thing they had in common was their genetics. Kai knew he had inherited a predisposition to addiction, and was intent that his determination and responsibility would slay that dragon and win the war for future generations. He had read what a difference individual decisions had had on successive generations in the Bible and knew there were big forces at work here. Kai envisioned his inclination toward addiction as a Medieval dragon, one that slid like a snake silently along his subconscious soil, wrapping itself around Kai in the stupefied states that he loved to get in. Nope, LSD, Shrooms, Coke, they'd all be too much fun and leave an even

deeper chasm between the reality Kai would wanted to inhabit and the real world, where a life that could sustain him lay. Suffice to say, Kai shortened his explanation to Carl:

“Ah naaa bru, problem is I'd like it too much.”

“I hear you,” Carl said, “you will. Physically you can't get addicted, but I know what you're getting at 'cos I'm the same way. What works for one person might not work for another. I say potato, you say *potahto*.”

No one said *potahto*, but Kai let Carl's international ignorance slide and acknowledged his attempt with a forced smile. “For me man,” he continued contemplatively, “life is there to be experienced, you know. LSD used to be used in psychotherapy; it cured alcoholism.” Kai was listening as Carl elaborated, “Same thing, it completely changes your sense of time. Look man, the way I see it,” he squelched out between the final exhalations of the dying joint, “spiritual growth is like this mountain that we're all climbing up, right. Some take the drug path, and some people take the religious path. And like you're trotting up the lucid dream path at the moment. But when we get to the top brah, we all share the same view. Maybe *that's* what is objective. Like these timeless understandings like...time not being real...and knowing what's important...wanting peace. The ground at the top of the mountain is breathing, alive, paradoxically due to the lack of conventional oxygen. We've each gotta find our own path my African homey, and I'm loving that you're looking for yours.” He squashed the dead joint into the moon colored bench that would now smell like smoke.

Carl's mention of the ground breathing instantly took Kai back to a lucid dream he had had in which he was on a farm and the grass was heaving in and out with each breath. Every flower and living creature brimmed with personality, as he awaited a group of Victorian farmers

to return home from their journey. How come LSD seemed so similar to so many of the experiences Kai has had? Maybe Carl had a point about this mountain thing. He could tell that they were wrapping up their conversation in synch with the burnout of the joint wrapping.

“All these people who try to tell me about God. What do they know about God? To me God is love, and no one should try to guilt you or expose you to negativity to discover her. Can't we all just be happy? I mean sure, everyone has got these skeletons in our closets, but I ain't no fan of kicking it with bones yo.” He was getting going now, escalating like a lawyer about to make his indisputable grand closing summary speech. “Forget the past, and the dark ages of superstition! I've got flesh and blood and I want to feel alive. Life is about living and being happy, and doing what you can to make other people happy. Dwelling on the negative aspects just brings me down. People should just go with the flow bro...you know. Life's not that serious!”

Kai knew what Carl was trying to say, but there was an aura of wishy washiness to this worldview that he couldn't quite articulate; a fleetingness that lacked solidity. Something one of his buddies had once told him sprang to mind, and he decided to share it with Carl in case the sudden recollection of the idea was God-inspired and was exactly what Carl needed to hear to make him reevaluate his dismissal of things that aren't easy to face. Kai wanted to be a vessel of God like that, but he didn't want to offend his open-minded friend. “F.E.A.R.”, Kai gently and slowly recalled the wording, “can mean Forget Everything And Run, or it can mean Face Everything And Rise.”

“I know man, some people are so afraid to face life that they hide behind their dry books and dogmas.”

Carl hadn't got it. In fact the lenses he was looking through made him distort the meaning that Kai had intended to convey in the opposite direction, serving only to further justify Carl's own worldview. Kai didn't pursue it further.

"I hear you bru." Kai said.

That night the silver moonlight ignited the first gnawings of dissatisfaction. He wanted to get out of there; he had itchy feet.

CHAPTER 9: **WHICH PATH Leads to the Rabbit's Party?**

Cornwall, England – Kai's 23rd rotation around the sun

CHAPTER 9.1: Which Path – Feasting on Nutritious Meat and Potatoes

Without much warning, Kai found himself awakening to hear a different set of sounds. He had moved to England and the sing song squawking of Cornish seagulls joyfully pierced his eager ears! The pirates of old would awake to, and be carried along by, the same melody, and Kai was content to kick it in true Cornish pirate style. It seemed to almost be a manifestation of the other melody that Kai and JP used to sing as an affirmation every Friday night on their Capetonian clubbing carousing. The cobbled stones of Newquay' main streets still echoed the cheers and ruggedness of past centuries, and every building was saturated with history. Stories, depth, connection.

Kai had met a blonde girl who worked at a bar in town, and had quickly moved in with her. Rent in England was too expensive to pass up an offer like that. He was in the process of getting to know Bella better. But better is not always better, and many an illusion can be shattered by staring at it for too long. Still, this was a time for the new...old. The old, reinvigorated by Kai's new mindset; he was ready to take England by storm!

The sense of a fresh start put a chirpier swing in Kai's step as he walked along the paved path that strolled itself into town like a listless British librarian. Red-breasted Robins raced along rugged rows of Cornish Elm trees. The deep green of the overarching vegetation bore Kai in its earthly womb, hiding away the passing of centuries. This could be the Middle Ages, and in a way it still was. The garden path burst open, birthing Kai into a cascade of turquoise blue ocean that sang of sweet Newquay. As Kai dotted through the ancient alleys and side roads he imagined medieval fishermen's wives hanging washing from the windows of their salt-bleached houses. He was on a surf check before his shift started at 3.

Kai had picked up a job in a kids afterschool play group, taking the position because 1) he was sick of waiting, 2) he needed cash after his unpaid sorcery salivation sessions of San Francisco, and 3) he was fascinated with the untainted and honest personas of little humans who hadn't yet been indoctrinated into fitting in. He expected this to be a great opportunity to learn about who we are as a species and explore reality from a developmental perspective. He was right: it was a great opportunity to learn about development. He was wrong: the development wasn't that of the children (if chronological age is what defines us as a child) - it was of his own development.

The kids flocked to him, attuned to his energy like children are so apt at doing. He was able to interpret the look in their eyes and answer their requests in light of that. In general they

just wanted a little acknowledgement. He noticed that the adults hardly ever took the kids seriously, and even more seldom took the time to stop everything else they were doing and engage with a child whole-heartedly. Kai promised himself that he would take parenthood as seriously as anything else in this life. He learned more from the blissful simplicity of the kids than they learned from him. Their open-mindedness was contagious, and Kai grew as he learned that wisdom does not necessarily result from the passage through time; it is a product of our choices and alliances.

The surf sucked. This was England. But it was rarely that huge of a disappointment, as adventure was reliably to be found in the green in his pipe if not in the green room of the barrel. Kai had decided that he would start smoking weed again, just in small doses this time. He wanted to access that dormant power that had left his life bland in its absence.

The late morning weak sun tickled Kai's skin as he slithered himself between the white-tipped boulders on the Eastern side of the beach, searching for a solo interlude with nature herself. Ah, the smoking ritual! A shell would catch his eye here, a contorted rock there, always luring him towards the rendezvous spot the Universe intended, one white rabbit at a time. Hands outstretched, pulling himself up towards a higher level of consciousness, he scoured up the Stonehenge-like cliffs on the uncrowded side of the beach.

He found a lookout point with a broad view and perched himself at the top, looking down like the 12 o'clock position of the sundial. The peak of humanity; unperturbed by the small English folk in the distance who were blissfully lying on the beach. The terms "bliss and lying" to be substituted for "ignorant and truth-hiding" at one's own discretion. Pipe packed and heart anticipating its exercise with some preliminary beats, Kai put a flame to the day. In between the

puffs, he found himself praying for God to grow him. No fire this time, only warm lungs. I guess God's communication methods change through our development, Kai thought.

The journey home was a swim around a fishbowl, with each passerby inconsiderately making Kai the sole focus of their attention. Or at least that's how it seemed. Sunglasses were necessary, despite the thickening layers of clouds. When people looked into his eyes he felt naked, his awkward glance avoidances barring the exposure of his soul. Sunglasses helped people see themselves in the reflection, which is what most people want out of a conversation anyway, he reasoned.

Suddenly and unexpectedly, Kai had a soul-level remembering of where he was. He was in *England* again! He felt his own foreignness as a tangible redness; as a plum thrown into an apple pie, swimming in the juice of Pounds and Pennies, Pommie slang, and white legs. The pastry binding him together with these polite passersby was the shared intersection of the dimensions of time and geographical coordinates. Co-ordinates that at this particular point in time Kai would have been happy to fudge; and not this tasteless sugary fudge of Cornwall either, real Saffa stuff. He missed home. Kai traversed every mile between himself and South Africa in his mind - a couple of thousand too many lay between him and his heart. And a couple of thousand too *short* lay between him and the afterschool kids center, as his upcoming shift overclouded the clouds.

And then suddenly, out of the blue (or grey) there it was: another white rabbit sent as the universe's translator, making clear the message of Its intention. A simple blue poster with white lettering tugged on Kai's consciousness from a waist-high stand at the bottom of 3 time-worn steps. "Come home you laborers, and I will give you rest." That's all it said. Nothing forceful, nothing extravagant. Easily stepped passed, or over...or on. Kai knew by now that these silently

subtle screams could hold the potential to be moments that shaped lives. The sign lay innocently adorning the entrance way to what seemed like a tiny studio or office. He was intrigued by how much the simple words spoke to his homesick emotional state at that particular time. If it was the universe or God calling, he wanted to pick up the phone, despite the effort it took. He climbed the same old 3 steps that countless others had. His outstretched protrusion of a hand twisted the daunting brass door knob lightly. The wind caught the door, pulling them both into a corridor that seemed lighter than he would have expected. Kai still had his sunglasses on and was content to hide behind them for this whole endeavor. The light of the place gave him a good excuse to anyway.

A desk loomed at the end of the corridor, with social interaction as heavily laden in its presence as the paper weights he could see holding down beige stacks of pages, writhing to get free as the wind gave them one chance at a life unburdened. Reluctantly Kai traversed the distance between him and the desk, knowing that the sound of the door opening would have alerted whoever was there. This would have simultaneously erected their awareness as an insurmountable barrier between Kai and his desire to head back out the way he came in. The wind he could fight, but awkward retreat wasn't an option. He avoided social interaction at the best of times, and when he was stoned the best of times were always upon him.

To his relief, there was no one at the desk. He reluctantly pressed the flat bell, vowing to pursue this lead, and then visually scoured the vicinity for snippets of written data. "Light and Life" were written on the sky blue walls in bold white letters. A stack of business cards lay on the desk that read Luke O - pastor. This must be a Christian office or something. An enticing marketing exterior that shelled financial motives no doubt. But still, this was a spiritual avenue, and one that the white rabbit had led him down. Should he stay to pursue it? Or could he placate

the rabbit's invitation by grabbing a business card and bolting? This was his opportunity to avoid the social interaction; he could get the data without bearing himself, which was win-win. Quickly he fumbled with the stack of business cards, taking three by mistake, almost not wanting to take the time to put them back in case someone came in the meantime. But then he suddenly became aware that those 3 business cards could be the tickets to three more people's journey starts. Thwarting God's work wasn't on his agenda for the day, so he flapped the excess two cards on the pack like soldiers out of line and hurried back out the exit hole. The outside wind embraced him again, a friend. He'll give the number a call when he's sobered up and leave a message for the Universe, so that hopefully the call gets returned.

It was one of the 4 year old purity tots who prompted Kai to finally call the number and leave a voicemail after a week of the card glaring at him from his wallet. The little one had innocently told him that he was far from home when she had learned he was from Africa. He'd never been one to lie to a kid. "Yes I am," he conceded. He almost dialed the digits when he got back to his place after that shift. He was tired of being a wandering wonderer journeying through the spiritual wilderness. But he decided to smoke instead, and then didn't wanna talk to anyone.

CHAPTER 9.2: Which Path - Tantalizingly Spicy Asian

Kai's sober world was a thin slice of meat sandwiched in a triple decker between the stoned reality, drunken party nights with the English crew, and increasing snippets of time spent in the realm of lucid dreaming. Kai's Oneironaut persistence over the previous months was beginning to pay dividends, and he was waking up inside his own imagination 2 or 3 times a

week. A major leap in his progress had happened when Kai linked his ability to program his own mind with lucid dreaming.

Years ago Psyche had taught him about the power of the mind to reprogramme itself. It was called neuroplasticity and was based on our choices to a significant extent. Psyche had explained that our brains are bombarded by 400 *billion* little wallups of information a second, bam bam bam! No wonder the day is exhausting! But our little grey guys are under-capacitated, and can only process 100 million bits of data. 0.00025 is all we get to fully digest. Look, if Kai was at a buffet with 10,000 choices of dishes he could eat, but could only chow down on 2 and a half, he was going straight for the good stuff! In life, that translated to focusing on the positive and the adventurous nutritional doses that ran through daily occurrences. The more you exercise particular neuro-circuitry, the stronger and more natural those modes of functioning become.

Kai's persistent choice to think optimistically had endowed him with a consistent set of rose-tinted lenses that now colored his life effortlessly. And the aroma was beautiful! Kai was reaping the benefit of seeing silver linings in even the gloomiest of English cloud cover. Not so long ago he had thought that learning about schemas was dry and irrelevant, but now the construction of a custom-made schema was bearing delicious fruit in his life. He was combining his knowledge from Psyche, his education, and even some spiritual principles that he had inadvertently picked up. For instance a parallel concept echoed in a vague memory of a sermon back in the Catholic Church. Paul was talking about having your mind renewed and being transformed through that. This insight crept its way into Kai's consciousness as a taunt that he may not have been as open minded back then as he would have adamantly advocated. Mark Twain's words were finding new relevance: "When I was a boy of 14, my [church] was so

ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old [archaism] around. But when I got to be 21, I was astonished at how much [organized religion] had learned in seven years.”

What he had learned recently that had injected the quantity of his lucid dreams with steroids, is that if he ate and breathed lucid dreaming for an hour before he fell asleep, priming his mind, his lucid lungs fairly reliably breathed new life into his astral body and awoke him with a surprisingly real breath of dream air. This Thursday night his lungs didn't fail in their connection to his heart.

Musty smelling castle walls surrounded the dreaming Kai, who found himself in 1559, in the skin of a wizard, looking out through Kai's own eyes. A wizard with a piece of knowledge of a scientific caliber; the sort that has endowed magicians with the air of mystery they've basked in for generations. What Kai knew was the inherent value of the metal platinum, as well as where a nauseatingly vast supply lay undiscovered. Kai's ticket to financial liberation, and all the other types of liberation that entailed, lay buried beneath Kálvária mount in medieval Hungary.

An urgency pressed down on the dark primal night, which felt like a weight that made it hard for Kai to breathe. He had to get to the supply before morning. But, as so often happens in dreams, the very substance of the dream was conspiring to stamp defeat all over Kai's dream of freedom. A little boy wouldn't let go the cloak of his garment, and his girlfriend at the time kept hiding the shovel that Kai needed to unearth the treasure as soon as Kai looked away. The persistent frustration combined with the apparent gravity of the situation made Kai question his predicament, and instantly lucidity swept over him like a submersion in a cold pool. No need for the watch trick, Kai had transcended time without its reference.

He shook his head once in an attempt to sober up, and then spun around so as to activate the vestibular system and lock himself in the dream. His radiating blurry vision from the spin ground to a halt, and his focus gathered on the brown eyes of the little boy innocently tugging on his faded grey robe. He boy had Kai's own face. A vague sense dawned on Kai that this may all be allegorical. Who was this annoying kid? Was he a personification of something holding Kai back, one of his vices perhaps, like insecurity, or pride, or lust that was holding him back from his dreams? Kai felt the tug pull taught on his right shoulder as they both inhaled the same starchy air.

Kai had a couple of tricks up his sleeve. With a dart of his intention, he teleported to the grass path in front of the spot where the raw platinum lay buried. An overgrown field spread out before him, cloaked in mist. The layer of moisture enclosed Kai and the portion of the field he focused on in a world of their own. He couldn't see properly in this realm. His vision extended only a few feet in front of him, and the dream seemed to unearth itself as he encroached on it with his hazy vision. Kai wondered whether the waking world might bare the same intrinsic characteristic – that physical reality only manifests itself to the extent that human consciousness looks. The universe is seen to be increasing in size in direct proportion to humanity's ability to look. This is not because the universe lies out there waiting to be discovered, but because conscious awareness creates it with each nook and cranny it is able to unearth.

Right now his intention to unearth the platinum with his psychic abilities seemed to be thwarted by some impenetrable force field that his power couldn't break through. The question of how he was going to transport it didn't seem to be an issue in this realm. He didn't seem to think he needed muscles or strength. Since his psychic abilities that he put so much faith in were proving to be impotent, he would have to resort to creativity. Ever the entrepreneur, never the

quitter, he manifested a shovel from the material of his mind. He was taken aback for a split second by how contrary to his idea of a shovel this wooden medieval one that appeared in his hands was. Gripping the rough timber, he began putting all his physicality into hacking chunks out of the moist earth. Turns out strength and endurance was needed. Pieces of rock mixed with dirt scraped against the iron tip of his shovel until the soil dissipated away, leaving only the clanking of iron on stone.

A formidable, seemingly impenetrable barrier yelled up in opposition to Kai's progress. The familiar heat of frustration returned to Kai, and heralded a temporary lapse in lucidity as he frantically searched around the field for another option to get to his treasure.

"What's up doc?" Kai almost didn't hear the animated voice in the mayhem of his frantic search. But a part of him, probably the most conscious part, yanked his head toward the sound in an assault to his engrossment in his endeavor. There in the north western corner of the field was a linen sign or banner that he was sure wasn't there a second ago. "Raise Spiritualist House", it read. Say what? He deemed the sign as ...well, a sign, and abandoned his frantic antics in order to investigate it further. Upon closer inspection, it was more of a masterpiece, a victory flag, than it was a typical sign. The background was purple satin, and adorning its luscious majesty was sparkling silver thread spelling out infinitesimally intricate letters. The banner was tapered towards a point, channeling Kai's attention toward the bottom left where, gleaming with promise, lay a trap door of ebony wood. Kai, tantalized momentarily by the glitz of his discovery, was slapped again by the realization of the time crunch ever squishing his opportunity of financial liberation.

Somewhere in his periphery he heard a cat meowing. It seemed to be saying "Take your time, treasure takes time to mine." He didn't pay too much attention to it. He had always been

more of a dog person. Hastily he raised the surprisingly light trap door to be greeted by a tunnel that seemed transported directly from a Star Trek movie. Alternating black and grey rings carried with them the promise of Disneyland Space Mountain adrenalin, as they drew Kai down into the perpetual blackness. Kai left behind the field, what now seemed like primitive medieval marshland, and careened unstoppably toward the direction he knew the stash of platinum was. It seemed he had found a shortcut, and just in time! Although something seemed illegal about it, he didn't see any other options. The physicality of his previous labor attempt was beneath him in its primitiveness and the amount of time and energy it consumed. Now he was beneath it. A vision of the tunnel opening into a lavish white wonderland lay in his mind like a travel brochure for a new plane of life. 'I wonder if this is what a near death experience is like,' Kai mused as the tunnel pulled him along with no effort of his own.

The velocity was increasing imperceptibly, but Kai's subconscious was registering the speed as rollercoaster-induced adrenaline, and endorphins had Kai blissful. Not only was he accomplishing what he had been frantically searching for the whole time in the medieval world, but he was enjoying the trip! Waves of lucidity broke over Kai in refreshing showers of awareness. But with each passing wave, Kai felt more underwater. The most recent wave had tipped some kind of breaking point in his homeostasis and made Kai aware of his inability to control the speed at which he was moving. A mild sense of panic caressed his heart with sinister fingers, and he began looking for a way out. As if in response to his search for an exit, the end of the tunnel manifested itself out of and from the blackness. It was a solid wall, which presumably incased the platinum. He was heading straight for it at lightning speed! Was it penetrable? Well this was his shot – he was either going to shatter the wall and fall into fortune, or the wall was going to shatter him, and he was going to join in the Fall!

Kai awoke in his white poofy bed and breathed in reality. Phew, he had escaped annihilation, but the riches had also alluded him. Thoughts raced to catch up with where he found his body, “England, his girlfriend, he works today, he needs to finalize his visa application.’ And just like that the waking world was a boulder dropped in the less substantial venture of his dream. The dream had no choice but to retreat. For now. But you can never hide from your inner journeys. An ostrich with its head in the sand can successfully reduce the brighter world to a rumble, but never succeed in escaping it. Kai sleepwalked through his morning routine, his mind on the pressures that awaited him – today, next week, the next couple of months. The only consolation was his leafy acquaintance. Before he knew it, Kai found himself huddled on the deserted side of the beach, pipe in hand.

The visa errand turned into a day-long saga as he wound his way toward Penzance in pursuit of a bearer of the right to seal a certified copy. St Michael’s Mount stood formidable on his left hand side as his car bobbed up and down on the drive through the hill country. St Michael’s Mount, a monastery that is built on a mini-island accessible only when the tide is low, was a testimony to the monks who found this land enchanted with a long-lost mysticism.

Again re-immersed in the bustle of society, he made his way down the brown and white High St, documents in hand. The door of the agency he needed to sign off on his document was sealed shut, unshakably defying the success of his quest. Dammit. If he hadn’t have been stoned he would have called first, but didn’t want the unnecessary conversation. It was Wednesday at 3pm - business hours. ‘Who has the audacity to defy conventional society by shutting down my errand so inconsiderately?’ he murmured, ironically contradicting his usual insistence that the English’s insistence on conformity was outdated. He nonverbally cursed their business as he turned his intention to the consolation found in a Steak and Guinness pasty.

As he walked down the side alleys, guarding his pasty from the ravenous seagulls and scurvy infested descendants of pirates who clustered in the shop entrance ways, his attention fell upon a stone cottage with a cross adorning the entrance way. What is this place? He stopped and stepped back into the street to digest this entity when he saw the words 'Christian Spiritualist Church'. No way, that word! Flashes of the silver letters of "spiritualist" from his dream the night before broke into his consciousness and he gasped quickly. Yes Lord! A combination of his roots in Christianity and his future in esoteric spiritualism!

He twisted the handle and the door flew open. There, standing in the doorway as if waiting for his arrival, was an ancient-looking lady half his size, beaming up at him with hawk-like eyes.

"Hello there dearie," the lady croaked, her water-soaked skin jiggling long after the words ended.

"Oh, hi," Kai apologetically winced, "I didn't realize...I was just hoping to get some information about this place. What is it?"

The lady's eyes gleamed, "I'm so glad you asked dearie, this is a sanctuary for the special; a reunion ground for old souls who aren't satisfied with mediocrity."

Woah! That was an answer that Kai would have to have rehearsed a hundred times before an interview to get right! Such penetratingness, such resonance with Kai's assurance that he was special - a level above almost everyone else on this planet.

"What do you guys do here?" Kai threw out, in reluctance to get an answer that would disqualify the divinity of the encounter thus far.

"We merge. There are large gatherings and small ones. What draws you in?"

"Actually it was a dream I had in which..."

"A dream you say?" she interrupted, raising the pitch of her voice at the end of the sentence like a magician about to pull a rabbit from a hat, "Well then I know the perfect person to get you in touch with. His name is Ray, and he holds an intimate meeting on Thursday nights at 7. Would you be able to come back then?"

Kai blended rationality and impulsivity into a jittery word collage: "Well I'm not sure really. I mean, well, ya ok, sure. Do you have his phone number?"

"No I don't dear. Not his phone number, no. Just bring your little self along on Thursday you hear. Ok? Then it is set. Oh he will be thrilled!"

"Alright cool, I'll be here! Thank you." Kai injected a dose of regular societal interaction to close off a random encounter so as to introduce at least some conventionality that the rational part of Kai's mind could get a grip on. She hadn't even asked for his name. And he didn't know hers. No handshakes. No formalities. It was like he was almost hypnotized; mesmerized by the other-worldliness of her persona.

Is he going to go on Thursday? He almost just agreed so as not to seem confrontational to an unexplainable power. The same kind of thing as putting back the business cards in that Christian place. In fact the two encounters bore a similar out-of-this-world hue, although he could sense they were two vastly different frequencies below the surface. He had been granted two seemingly divinely inspired invitations for exploration within a week. Would he accept either? Which one? Kai had never been one to commit exclusively to one thing. He'd just have to see how he felt later in the week.

CHAPTER 10: THE CIRCULAR O DISH

CHAPTER 10.1: The Circular O Dish– A Direct Channel to Ohm

Kai's ingrained patterns of response quickly provided a seemingly win-win solution to his dilemma. He'd do both! He'd have a buffet smorgasboard of spirituality – the Spiritualist Church, and conventional Christianity. This strategy had always seemed to work decently with girls, why not with spiritual relationships?

He wanted to try the Spiritualist Church first because it seemed more exciting. Conventional Christianity? Been there, done that. He'd get around to it when he had a chance.

Thursday evening rolled around and, despite the mild sense of dread that accompanied almost all appointments, especially new meetings, Kai had resolutely decided that this was an opportunity that was worth not passing up. It may, after all, be the work of God himself! An introspective drive later, and Kai found himself standing in front of the same enchanted building, this time aglow with dusk luminescence.

The old, over-sized wooden door was slightly ajar, unnoticeable from far, but as inviting as a secret entrance way in a mystery novel. A push initiated a conspicuously loud creak, betraying Kai's presence in the midst of his attempt to conceal it. Inside, dim light fell on velvet blue carpets, with archaic-looking paintings of people, mostly old ladies, perched on the walls. They seemed to be scrutinizing newcomers. Muffled voices pitter pattered their way to Kai's

cold ears. He felt a sense of his ears warming up as he couldn't help but feel like the murmuring was about him.

"Hello?" he squeaked out bashfully.

"In here," came the tinny reply. It was a man's voice.

Kai followed the voice through the corridor tunnel and into a room on the left. There, seated around a crimson-covered oak table was an idiosyncratic flurry of individuals whose presence confirmed Kai's entrance into the world of the Lord of the Rings. There were about 6 or 7 of them, and their eyes shone up at him from varying heights as their muttered conversation instantly ceased. At least one or two of them had a gleam of suspicion in their now slanted eyes, which ignited the suspicion in Kai's own mirror neurons. They looked more like an assortment of dwarfs, gnomes, wizards, and witches than *Homo sapiens*, and Kai felt tangibly more ape-like and plain.

"Hi guys, is one of you Ray?" Kai broke the silence with a shrill resonance.

The looks softened and a number of them smiled mildly. One dwarf-looking creature bore his teeth as he smiled, and Kai was torn between wishing he hadn't, and retaining a laugh.

"Yes. I am." A tall, lanky figure elongated himself from the apex of the table. He looked like he was in his mid-50's and was well dressed in a grey suit with a pink collared shirt blaring confidence from underneath. His silver hair was sleeked back with black streaks creating the same kind of contrasted effect that his bright shirt and dull suit made. His face was worn, aged, but bright blue eyes shouted youth from their sunken sockets.

"I assume you're here for our group. Please have a seat." No introductions, no handshake? Kai realized that he was going to have to abandon all conventional etiquette at the entrance way to this place. "What brings you here?" Ray asked as he reclaimed his seat and assumed an interrogation posture, hands folded with elbows on the table.

"I'm not sure really," Kai felt increasingly uncomfortable, "this lady I met said I should come here because I'm into dreaming."

The dwarf-looking creature seated immediately on Kai's right startled him with his unmoderated volume as he gurgled, "Dreams, yes dreams! Dreams..." and then faded into a quiet murmur.

Kai whipped his head around and paused for a moment, not knowing if this outburst needed a response or not. He turned back to Ray, whose interrogation glare had eased slightly.

"Very good," he nodded, "you're in the right place. We were just about to begin."

Everyone in the circle closed their eyes simultaneously. Kai thought that the hippy lady opposite might have winked at him as she closed her eyes, but he couldn't be sure. At least now with her eyes closed he could look at her. She wasn't bad at all. Maybe older than his typical age group of interest, but he could see she had an above average figure, and her blonde streaked hair waved seductively across the table. Maybe Kai would enjoy coming here after all.

"Divine consciousness, higher self, we request your presence in this room." Ray's authoritative voice, and pause at the end of the sentence, seemed to usher in a lowering of the lights, although the room was solely lit by candles, and so Kai reasoned this couldn't be possible. Kai closed his eyes half in an attempt to hide, half to make sure he wasn't missing out on what

everyone else was experiencing. 'Jesus please protect me,' he stamped in his mind distinctly, on top of Ray's now melodic voice.

"Feel the Kundalini rise from your base chakra through the increasing vibrations of red..." he paused and breathed in audibly. A mutual meditation! Ok, Kai could go for that. "Orange..." Ray continued, "Yellow... green... blue... indigo... and gold. Now feel your energy exit through the top of your head." Kai got the sense that these words were directed at him, and so he did picture the various chakras, impressed with himself now that he realized that he had been doing a similar meditation at home for months now anyway. "Now let your consciousness embrace this room as the vessel of your body can no longer contain you." By now Kai was feeling slightly larger than his head. He felt like his body was made of lead and his head was a rising hot air balloon. And this sensation dawned on him much quicker than it ever had before. "Now feel yourself expand as you imbibe the whole town... now this country... then the whole planet... til space itself can no longer confine you." Kai did feel an expansion, but it remained trapped a couple of inches above his head.

Silence.

"Who is there?" Ray broke the stillness to ask commandingly.

'Who's he talking to? Am I supposed to answer?' Just as the silence was preparing Kai's vocal chords to ease the expectancy, the pretty hippy made a sound. Kai had to open his eyes to make sure it was her talking, as the voice didn't sound suited to her petite figure. It was groany, almost masculine, elongated as if drowsy.

"I'm here," she reverberated.

Ray asked her to clarify her name.

“Samuel,” came the flat monotonously toned reply.

‘Samuel?’ Kai pondered, ‘Oh my word, is this chick channeling a spirit? This is intense!’

“You’re welcome here Samuel,” Ray assured the spirit, “do you have any messages for us?”

“You old soul laboring amongst the young”, she projected words at the wall with eyes flickering behind closed eyelids. “Don’t be afraid to fall head first down the hole. But in order to fall, your guard needs to too.” The sound tapered off into the ether, echoing uncomfortably as Kai was left assured the message was for him. *He* felt like an old soul! The rabbit hole? Alice’s rabbit hole had always intrigued him. And he literally labored amongst the young in his work with kids. ‘I guess it could be a metaphor for people in society with fewer incarnations too.’

Kai knew that esoterism held fast to a belief in reincarnation. He wasn’t sure what he felt about it himself. It did make sense on three levels: 1) It accounted for the strange stories all too often reported of past life memories in their various formats that were later externally verified. 2) It explained the apparent different levels of consciousness among individuals of the same species. And 3) It tied evolution with free will in that the constant betterment and increasing complexity of the natural order depended on decision making and character building. It made him feel like he was advanced anyway, despite there remaining some serious reasons to discount it.

He didn’t know what to do with this lady’s utterances. Was Samuel a dead guy? Well then howcome this spirit hadn’t been reincarnated? And what reserves did heaven bust out to account for the population explosion? Had this Samuel chap achieved Nirvana in the Buddhist

sense? Maybe he was an angel, or worse, a demon. What defenses was he/she talking about? Ever self-conscious, Kai didn't want to make it all about him so he waited for any viable cues he could read from the assortment of characters amassed around the table before he responded.

"Samuel, are you still with us?" Ray enquired.

"It's just me Ray," answered the suitably feminine voice of the hot girl, seemingly tired now. All of the sudden she was appealing again. But not *that* appealing after what he had just witnessed! Kai thought that his *current* girlfriend was a complex case; he was suitably put off of taking a complication upgrade. No one said anything for a few moments.

Then the gnome guy piped up, "I felt like that was directed at me."

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Back in the conventional world, Kai pondered the experience, questioning the authenticity increasingly as time went on. But he remembered on a theoretical level that he was convinced at the time. He couldn't sleep properly that night. When Kai would wake up between sleep cycles, the room was filled with transparent people casually conversing, seemingly oblivious to Kai's presence. Every second night, a giant spider sinisterly descended towards Kai's head before vanishing in a luminescent flash about 3 seconds after Kai opened his eyes. *After* he opened his eyes!

CHAPTER 10.2: The Circular O Dish - Enlarging the Circle

Kai couldn't wait til the next Spiritualist Circle. He wanted someone else to come with him though as both a safety anchor to the rational world, as well as someone to share this inner journey with. The guy who lived next door to him, Jordy, also smoked weed and was self-reflective and open during their bong sessions. As their acquaintanceship developed into a friendship through their stoner, party and surfing escapades, Kai had been able to increasingly discern the pattern of light and dark clashing in his life. He seemed like a man caught between two worlds, and Kai was increasingly able to relate to the feeling of doing the splits between realities.

Jordy wasn't as flexible as Kai. He was a rugby player who had been deeply initiated in the testosterone-fueled chest thumpings that the Alpha male world involved. During the times that he came out drinking with the crew, Kai noticed a much coarser character emerge from the usually gentle giant. As alcohol gave his central nervous system a chill pill, subconscious forces snuck through cracks in the cortex's concentration. It would start with him swearing more. Then it would move toward an unjustified suspicion that people were bumping into him on purpose. Finally Mr Hyde would come out of hiding swinging – literally. He would purposeful seek out fist fights. That was always the point where Kai made use of having the taxi company on speed dial. He knew all too well what a large percentage of aggressive English lads operated under these same base-chakra impulses on their nights out. They would looking for adrenaline in whatever forms it could be found: first attempt: drinking; second: girls; third: fighting. Kai had a couple of scars to show for it. And also some guys' shoe that he had yanked off in the midst of the mayhem when he had been jumped by 8 guys on the bus. Now the shoe is a testament to the fact that pack syndrome results in lads becoming bare-footed like the dogs they aspire to be. It's funny what animalistic impulses alcohol will bring out in people. Kai liked to think that he was

the exception. He was unadulteratedly hilarious when he'd been drinking. In the interim he was content to sweep drunken regrets under a rug the next morning and save spring cleaning for a different season.

Kai mentioned his Spiritual Circle experience to Jordy on Friday night while he and Jordy were letting their guards down in direct proportion to the downing of beer. Kai tried to be casual, at least as casual as you can be when you tell someone that you were kicking it with dead peeps the previous week. Jordy was intrigued and agreed to come – confirmation that he was searching too.

Their mutual intoxication and excitement about the circle paved the way for an epic party night. For the first time, Kai began to feel a sense of homeliness from England. He realized how many people he knew already, all with English accents, most of whom had never left their county. He got a surge of confidence when he thought about his colorful past. The colors of the night progressively blurred into each other, as did the handshakes, and the animated faces that would sing alongside Kai's to the songs they all knew in the town's nightclub.

Kai's drunken mind appreciated the power of the artform of music. It unites people across cultures and ages, all of whom use their subjective experiences of a song to empower a mutually shared objective one. Kai laughed to himself about how ridiculous dancing is, imagining the room full of bodies gyrating and swaying with the lights on and without the music.

Kai had learned to dance in a way that caught people's attention. It took years of intentional practice to perfect appearing unintentional. Kai would move himself hypnotically around sections of the dance floor that he had chosen for their girl-to-guy ration. He'd never lock eye contact with a girl for more than a split second. By doing this he got their attention

unobtrusively, so as to avoid making them feel self-conscious or cornered. He'd then continue rocking out with the boys. This served two functions: 1) it was a blast! 2) it was an outward testimony to everyone that this guy knew how to have a good time! And he certainly did! It was hard *not* to have a good time after a blood alcohol concentration in the double digits! When he was extroverted, he was *extroverted!*

Additional motivation came from the fact that his girlfriend was playing similar strategy games. He would never have initiated these disloyalty antics, but at this phase in his life was intent on outplaying people at their own games. He had easy and mature self-justification – she started it. He kinda saw it as a best of both worlds – he got to subtly flirt like a single guy, and go home like a boyfriend. He hadn't learned yet that he couldn't have his cake and eat it. Eating...it was the only consoling factor that minimized the disappointment of closing time. Stomach full of kabob, vision spinning slightly, Kai settled down to cross one more night off the calendar in his countdown to the Circle.

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As Jordy and Kai cruised the Cornish curved roads together on the way to the meeting, Kai couldn't help feeling proud of himself. He couldn't wait to expose these new worlds to all of his friends, starting with Jordy. These kinds of discoveries were the adult equivalent of a kindergarten kid who gets kudo credits for unearthing some comical crevice.

Jordy was greeted with the same suspicious look that Kai was initially met with, and it only now occurred to Kai that he should have checked the etiquette as far as bringing someone along. He guessed that since he was a stranger and was welcomed, well kinda, the philosophy must be the more the merrier. The suspicion dissolved when Jordy told the group about how he

has been interested in spirituality, but not religion, for years, although he had never meditated or anything. It seemed like the interest in these realms was a pre-requisite for being one of the gang. An excitement filled the faces of the Circle motley crew. They seemed to enjoy new exploration vicariously, as a traveler enjoys taking someone who's never traveled before along for the ride.

It was a ride that transcended space and time, and that transcended the English conventionality that Kai found so dampening. Yes, that conventionality had led the British to conquer empires, converting them all to a respect for Christianity and crumpets. But dull tradition was darkening individuality in the clouded country, and that frustrated Kai. Now, however, he was stoked to have discovered a place within the Motherland where idiosyncrasies certainly weren't shunned. The darkened cavern of the Spiritual Circle, which dismissed the light of the Enlightenment Age, seemed like the perfect place to seek a deeper kind of enlightenment. The darkness welcomed two more 'free-thinkers' to their number.

"Christ consciousness," Ray began, "fill this room with your vibrations."

Everyone, including Jordy, closed their eyes.

'Jesus protect me,' piped in Kai inaudibly.

Ray again led the group through the expanded awareness, and left an expanse of silence at the end for an spirits to make their presence known.

To Kai's disappointment, and partly embarrassment, no spirits rocked up. Kai felt bad for dragging Jordy all the way there. In consolation though, the silence lent credibility to last week's encounter. Kai had previously wondered whether the channeling experience had been

faked to impress new people. But now the group's refusal to put on a show convinced Kai about the authenticity of the whole thing.

The room remained still. Open. The presence of each of the gathered heterogeneous crew was now more tangible as an individual consciousness than people are in everyday interactions. Kai opened his eyes hastily to see what Jordy was doing. He still had his eyes closed. 'Good, at least he's going with it and isn't completely bored.

Ray drew the session to a close and regular animation returned to the smorgas board of human entities in the room.

"Who would like to share?" Ray offered expectantly.

'What is there to share? I had a glamorous session in the dark behind my eyelids,' Kai taunted in his mind. As usual, not much extraordinary confronted Kai in his meditation session. Typically he noticed his mind calm down to one to two wispy thoughts a minute. His body and hands would feel heavy and, on the good ones, he would feel like he was sitting a few inches above and behind his body. This time he hardly even had any of that happen.

Lame.

"Actually yeah," came Jordy's unexpected voice from next to him. "That was *well* mental mate!" He looked around the room quickly as if to assess for their reactions. Eager eyes beamed back and he continued, "First off, right, I felt someone step on me foot. Then I felt like they...like...hugged me from behind and rubbed me face. I had me eyes closed, but looked down at me 'ands. There was this blue light and, like, lightning electricity around 'em. Next thing I know mate, I was lifted out of this here room and was flying above Canada. Bloody flying mate! And all these faces were flashing past me."

'Wait, what?! This had actually just happened to Jordy?' Kai was washed over with a wave of mystery tinged with slight confusion. 'Was there something wrong with my technique? Am I not as spiritually advanced?'

The odd squad met Jordy's story with a look of success, of a victory shared.

"Very good Jordy, you're a natural. I could tell when you walked in here based off the angle that you stood at and the way the tea leaves in my cup arranged themselves. You had an Indian with you too," Ray bragged, trying to share in the glory. Well the glory was all theirs. All of theirs except Kai's, and he went home perplexed, intrigued, and proudly validated in his decision to bring Jordy along.

Needless to say, Jordy was Kai's Thursday night companion for the next 2 months. Each of the strange characters at the circle came alive and seemed more normal as time went on. Kai had some fascinating conversations with various members of the group. They seemed to be aware of a level of knowledge that lay hidden from those who ran about flustered by conventional society.

Everyone, including Jordy, would receive insights about the others in the circle during their meditations. These insights were almost always confirmed by the other party. Impossible things to know. Dharma knew that Jim was having construction done on his house; Jim knew that Ray's cousin had just died.

Becka and her sister Kylie both looked like witches. They were extroverted and forceful when sharing their visions, but when the Circle was not in session they would avoid eye contact and mumble. Kai didn't understand the drastic transition.

Becka wowed Kai one day. She told him that she had received a series of names that are relevant to him. She went on to name his ex-girlfriend, Mom, brother, and cousin. When she

got confirmation from Kai she went onto some more abstract revelations. She said that she had seen two tennis rackets in her third eye screen. One wasn't willing to play the game. She said this symbolized Bella, who Kai had never spoken about. Then she saw two hands holding batons - one was super strong and held it upright, while the other was wobbling all over the place. That same night Ray said he received two words for Kai: death and Jones. That was Bella's last name and Ray had never known that! Kai got shivers.

There was a middle aged lady named Susan who gave off a sad aura. A single parent, she knew that spirituality held the key to a future of light for her and her son. Kai liked her. She had her roots in Christianity, as did Kai. She was quiet.

The pretty blonde, Jez, turned out to actually *be* an aspiring witch. She skated sporadically on the verge of being romantic material for Kai, but her seemingly bi-polar mood swings always kept Kai contemplating whether to take a swing instead of actually stepping up to bat. Kai was fascinated to hear her takes on astrology, with the passing Age of Pisces and the arrival of the Age of Aquarius. Jez had explained to Kai that the age of Pisces was Jesus' era, his symbol since Christianity's earliest days being the fish. This Aquarian age is going to usher in a new paradigm for humanity, she had said, with our intrinsic divinity becoming clear to us, and opening up the portal for things that are as hard to imagine now as the internet was for folk in the Dark Ages. Jez's status as a self-proclaimed amateur witch made the profession seem much less sinister than the warted ladies of stories did. She didn't even need a point in her hat to poke through Kai's ignorance about what this Wiccan magick involved. Her explanations made sense, and wove a common thread through all sorts of intriguing phenomena. Her belief system seemed almost scientific, and linked stuff like astrology, the sacred masculine and feminine, pantheism, the phases of the moon, reincarnation, karma, energy work, and meditation

together in an enchanting worldview. Panentheism, in particular, resonated with Kai because it didn't turn the created universe into an idol of worship like Pantheism did, but did acknowledge the divinity that permeates creation, the divinity that Kai had become all too familiar with through nature's intelligent cooperation with him during his stoner sessions.

The gnome's name was Jim. Not a fittingly gnomey name Kai thought. But actually Jim was pretty cool too. He was like a wind-up toy that got all worked up at the energy use of someone else. He always got excited when talking to Kai, and Kai liked that. He seemed like more of a sidekick than a leader, although side-head-butter may have been more of an appropriate title than sidekick. His height made him more suited to *head-butt* a normally sized person in the side than to *kick* them, and his personality had the firmness of butter more than a kick. Kai smiled to himself imagining those podgy dwarf legs nimbly extending beyond Jim's head to kick someone in their side. Jim did have a couple of interesting things to say, and he was the one who turned Kai onto the Gnostic gospels. He was glad he looked into them 'cos they were surrounded by such hype, and Kai loved the idea of the hidden knowledge that they claimed to advocate. It turned out that the build-up and backstory to them created somewhat of an anti-climax, and Kai was disappointed when he actually read the material. They lacked a solidity that the Biblical Gospels had, and seemed radically incongruent. They made Jesus out to have killed 3 people.

Ray was a complicated one. The leader, he always seemed to be sizing up the situation, and everyone in it. There was an almost constant suspicion in his eyes. Kai started to notice some of the reasons why he would do things. He was some kind of manipulator of energies. He'd instigate Jim when the energy level of the room seemed to be dipping, and he'd play to people's interpretations of the visions they got during their meditations, validating them, and

then adding a little subtlety that seemed to go unnoticed by the recipient. But Kai noticed; he had been watching people for years. His fascination with them was what had led him to choose psychology as his degree focus. Ray was good with people too. He seemed to be aware of Kai's borderline skepticism.

Ray had two startling insights into reality that affected Kai's life, as well as one premonition that served to boost the genuineness of what could sometimes seem like a smoke and mirrors kind of pursuit. Ray would tentatively instruct Kai on certain aspects of the Occult, always with that menacing look of mistrust in his eye. The two insights that affected Kai the most came out during his profoundly succinct conversations with Ray. In a strange way it seemed like Ray was trying to be Kai's teacher. He gave Kai a glimpse into two subjects that he called glamor and Twilight.

Glamor was a form of energy manipulation that was accessed through emotion. Just the awareness of this ability seemed to make a tangible difference in Kai's daily life. Through mild practice, Kai's influence in social situations increased immensely! When he felt the power come on, he seemed to have a primal, almost hypnotic, effect on the psyche of the person or people Kai was interacting with. He had realized that he had been unknowingly harnessing a version of this skill since his late teens. It had been the same sense of leading that had convinced Jordy to come to the meeting! Now, in its conscious version, it performed feats that amazed Kai in their precision. He learned he could dictate each and every step in the successive assortment of pubs they would hit on their nights out. The impeccable timing and consistency of Kai's wishes manifesting in reality quickly dismissed any suspicions Kai had that it was just a coincidence. And this wasn't the only example of his influence. It stood out to Kai though because of the

complexity involved in manipulating the decisions of groups of 10+ people. If Glamor can do that with groups, imagine the scary potency it had in one-on-one interactions!

The second subject of conversation that Ray kept coming back to was Twilight. From what Ray said, it sounded like a synonym to the astral plane. Ray explained how he could manipulate the plane with his attention to make physical changes to reality, albeit little ones. He could also see the deepest desires of people and view things remotely. He explained how attention is like a beam of the sun. Spread out it can light up many fields of vision, but channeled under a microscope, it could burn holes in the very fabric of reality. Kai didn't quite understand how Ray meant Kai to approach this practically, but the concept made sense. He had often thought that the broad breadth of our knowledge in this era hindered the ability to go penetratingly deep in one specific region. It was like choosing a career. Kai had always enjoyed the smorgasbord approach to knowledge.

Ray was always quick to add intricacies that were latent in the visions that the others had. In fact Ray had finely honed in his skills of creative interpretation – he read into virtually everything that happened. If someone sneezed it was a sign of energy change in the room. When the bi-polar girl mentioned passing a hummingbird on the way to the circle, Ray interpreted that as a sign that they were all in for a mentally intense session. In fact it was this characteristic of Ray's that ended up exposing a darker element to the circle.

CHAPTER 11: Spicy Asian Heartburn

Kai's mind was in overdrive. His once peaceful surfs were now littered with allegory. After adrenalin-infused carves, where he'd stamp his creativity on the wave, he'd paddle back out whilst deriving analogies, carving out meaning from the canvas that nature gave him.

'Life's kinda like surfing,' he'd propose to himself between duck dives. 'You don't have any control over when the set waves of opportunity are going to come or what they're gonna break like. These are dictated by the natural order of things, and the shape of the terrain that lies beneath you. But you *do* have control of where you sit, and whether you go with the flow of the wave and make the most of it or not. I reckon you get more satisfaction out of surfing a small wave well than blowing a bomb. You need to learn to surf small waves well first before you can take sets, for your own safety. But once you know how to land the drop on sets and aren't intimidated by their size, then they're actually easier to get into the barrel on.'

Seagulls squawked in affirmation to the kinds of carves Kai's thoughts were making. 'You little grey and white dots of happiness,' Kai smiled. The ancient towering cliffs watched the two species' fleeting lives come and go, all the while losing itself to the persistent flow of the elements. It became the beach eventually. It too was reorganized by the Wind.

Is this truth? If there is such a thing then there is no better devotion of energy than aligning with it.

Nature was energy restoring. It accumulated in the storehouses of Kai's soul until it had no choice but to be unleashed somehow. Kai's choice of letting loose was a night on the town. There, Kai couldn't resist sporadic glitzy displays of his budding intuition. When the strength of his sense was adequate (and after the strength of his drinks was had proved equally adequate) he

would gather his friends together and correctly guess the next three songs that the DJ was going to play. Three out of four times he would nail all three.

What he liked about the alcohol is that it gave him the confidence to put himself on the line. He was still blown about by the need for external neurotransmitters to fill his security bucket. Without them, his rationality stifled his reach into the realm of rejection. 'It makes sense that I'm using the product of Jesus' first miracle to reach out to people!' he proudly professed as he circumvented linear logic.

That night Kai's head remained embedded in his pillow as his mind drifted off to a place where your thoughts don't have to be logical or linear.

Elegant white pillars rose on either side of the entrance to the house, making the approach seem royal and dignified. Kai's polished shoes clunked on the stone steps as he ascended to meet the majestic wooden door. The front of the house was kissed by an elaborate wreath that adorned the white wood. He didn't need to stop and think about it, but based on the flag and the ambience, it must have been 19th century America, on the forefront of the rising population wave.

Through the oversized door lay a magnificent ballroom, glimmering with gold and glass flashes. The finest materials and fashions colored a sea of top hats and frilled-up hair. A gentleman mutely took Kai's cane and handed him a drink. He felt at home, riveted by the new frontier of people to explore. His radiance was that of a minor celebrity as each person he passed acknowledged his presence with a smile or a nod, a bat of the eyelashes or a firm handshake. He knew that there were ample women who would be delighted to be on his arm at that particular moment, and that all the guys knew that too.

As he glided his way through a crowd of laughs and eyebrow salutes, he felt like an eagle soaring through its native territory. In order to assess the beauty of the situation from afar, Kai zoomed out in his consciousness, and watched the scene from the corner of the room. Suddenly he saw the dream for what it was, a dream. His lucidity dawned on him like a curtain being pulled aside, filling his eyes and ears with a symphony of clanking glasses, rambunctious chattering, and bopping bass piano beats from the ragtime music animating the room. It was when Kai lucidly observed himself from the outside that he began noticing it.

Pockets of people watching him until he looked in their direction, at which point they would jerkily resume their conversation. He suddenly felt conspicuous. In an instant Kai was back observing the room from his usual vantage point behind his eyes, now itchingly aware of their stares. Everyone was doing it, everyone. It was like this whole party was all about him. And in a kind of way that was too intense even for Kai's insatiable ego appetite.

Presently they all dropped the pretense and blatantly began staring at him, hundreds of eyes bearing down into his skin. The music stopped, everyone froze. They just stared at Kai.

"Wwwwwhat's going on here?" Kai tentatively challenged aloud, starting to back towards the door. He met their gazes with furrowed eyebrows, suddenly wanting to be out of the dream. He didn't wake up, he was locked in. That's when he saw these people for what they were. Blue eyes morphed into black, and dark rings appeared around each of their sinister stares. Nails grew like Wolverine protrusions on the hands of the 5 or 6 people nearest to him and Kai instantly knew this was a secret he wasn't meant to uncover. Anxiety turned to panic as the fanged and clawed demons lunged in his direction, a ravenous look breaking through their black eyes. To Kai's horrific realization, he couldn't manipulate the dream – all his lucid power

was impotent, there was no escape! He was moments away from being ripped to pieces! Was this the painful end of his life?

NO! Instinct and conditioning kicked in and Kai fell back on his placebo- effect pill of praying.

“Jesus help me!” Kai desperately screeched.

Instantly, inverse gravity began pulling Kai upwards towards the ceiling, and the demons grew swiftly smaller. But not fast enough! A vicious female sunk her infected claws into the flesh of Kai's thigh. The pain was excruciating! Kai knew it was a dream, but this pain was 90% as real as that of waking reality, and his mouth shot open to be met by the tightness of clenched eyes as another set of nails scraped down his calf, carving out chunks of bloody flesh. In piercing agony he was drawn through the ceiling by this relentless, yet painstakingly slow, upward force. The next thing he knew Kai found himself flung into waking reality.

The echo of pain resonated through his thigh and calf and caused him to shoot up in bed, grabbing his leg. The world bombarded him with familiarity as, for a second, he was torn between which world it was that he was inhabiting. A flood of relief fell over him and he sank back into bed. Accompanying the torrent of relief was an inexplicable, yet unsilencable, gnawing to go see that Christian guy from that day he had seen the sign in the alley. His reasoning voice chimed in to tell himself him that he didn't want another social interaction pressure, but he squashed it tenaciously and called to set up an appointment to see a guy called Luke the next day at 2.

The receptionist sounded old and nice - how bland. How typically boring of Christianity. Kai knew he had progressed beyond it. It wasn't till a few hours had passed that he thought to thank Jesus for pulling him out of that sinister situation, quite literally.

CHAPTER 12: Bland Potatoes have Deep Roots

The door to Luke's office seemed plainer than it did when the wind caught it that day when Kai was stoned. That same corridor stretched out before him, with the same empty desk at the end of it. Emptiness. Kai surveyed the room after ringing the bell on the desk. Why was no one waiting here at the desk with Bible poised in hand ready to bash him with? He had been practicing his Ninja Bible-blocking moves and was eager for an attempt to bust them out.

An athletic man calmly emerged from one of the rooms and made eye contact with Kai. This must be Luke. A quiet confidence radiated from youthful eyes. He was much younger than Kai had anticipated, early 30's probably. How could someone so young find vigor in dusty grey Christianity?

"You must be Kai. Hey great to meet ya mate!" Luke's outstretched hand accompanied his words, twanged out in a slight American accent. His firm grip confirmed the solidness that Kai was already sensing from him.

"I am! Thanks for meeting with me man, I appreciate your time." Kai liked to start off conversations with an expression of gratitude, he found it led to positive energy flow.

"No bro, thank *you* for hitting a brother up, you fought doubt to reach out. Mad respek."

Geez where did this guy come up with these lines? Are these lyrical responses a rehearsed lure to sucker people in. Doubt...out; no...bro; great...mate. Americans don't say mate. And pastors aren't gangstas. What is he like Ned Flanders crossed with 2Pac? Kai began suspecting the initial sense of genuineness that Luke radiated.

"Uh ya I guess it did. I don't even know why I'm here really man. I just stumbled across this place the other day, and then had a dream that left me feeling like I should give you a call." Kai had decided on the way over that he was gonna be real with this guy and dive straight in. He didn't wanna waste Luke's time, or especially his own.

"Nice. So this is kinda a dream come true for you then huh," Luke joked as smile lines assumed their creviced places around his eyes, "Well why don't you come through to my office and let's dive in. Cuppa tea?"

Dive in - those were Kai's words. "Ya sure, thanks man. I've come to like my tea living here."

Luke chuckled, "Oh I hear you. When in Rome do as the Romans, when on Pommie turf, make like the queen with her tea-drinking outstretched pinky!"

Kai faked a laugh; he had used a similar line to that before. His suspicions began melting again; he liked this guy. This instant rapport was seeming a little too good to be true though, and put a kind of expectancy on their interaction that Kai was slightly daunted by, although his masks were perfected so that it never showed.

Luke took Kai over to a tea station set up on the far wall. Kai had grown fond of the tea ritual that the English fell back on in a myriad of times. It distracted from awkwardness and provided a mutual mission to embark on. The warmth of the cups fused into Kai and Luke's

hearts, and soon cozy recliners enveloped any rigidity that usually comes from meeting a stranger.

“A dream huh? Pray tell,” Luke invited. Kai appreciated the return to the subject, and Luke’s straight-to-the-point approach.

“Ah wow, well there’s so much backstory to the dream.” Kai invited a confirmation to continue with a raise of his eyebrows, and Luke nodded upward once in confirmation to go ahead. “See I’ve been into lucid dreaming for a while, and a whole bunch of other crazy spiritual stuff that I became obsessed with after a mystical experience in San Francisco. My lucid dreams have always been cool. I mean it’s crazy man, have you ever heard of it?”

“Yeah I have actually. Fascinating stuff.”

“Ok cool.” Kai was slightly shocked that a pastor would know about such things, but he continued. “Well the flying ones and the mermaids and gnomes that I encountered were great, but in this dream the other night I was at this party and it all seemed grand until everyone there morphed into these demons and began clawing at my flesh. Like full on dude! And I was stuck in the dream! It was freaky...and painful!”

Luke grimaced in appropriate response, and Kai was surprised, seeing as though he felt like his words could hardly do the experience justice, especially from their current vantage point in comfortable cuppa land.

“Sthhhh, and you could feel that?!” Luke asked through clenched teeth. So he *did* know something about lucid dreams.

“Ya man I really really could! It was so bad dude, so bad.” Kai’s parallel thought process recognized that he’d just called a pastor dude for the second time. He looked for subtle clues to confirm the validity or rejection of it.

Luke just maintained his intrigued look, asked “How did you get out of it?”

Fancy asking that. There was the expected jump to the subject of Jesus just like Kai had been expecting Luke to make. Typical preacher. Oh but wait, he couldn’t have known that it was Jesus who busted him outa there; Kai hadn’t mentioned that yet.

“Well you know thinking about it now maybe that’s why I had the inclination to visit you today – ‘cos it was praying to Jesus that got me out of the dream.”

“Amen to *that* brother!” Luke gave a little fist pump in the air, which amused Kai and made him smile. He didn’t seem afraid to be dorky.

“Ya I guess it was me falling back on my instinctive response to danger. I’ve been raised Catholic but was never too into it. My mystical experience has just recently removed a veil from my eyes so that I can see how intriguing Jesus is.”

Luke smiled gently, knowingly. “And new levels of intrigue are unleashed with every inquisition, I feel you. God meets us where we’re at, even in the throngs of demons. He meets us where we’re at alright, but loves us too much to leave us there. And the beautiful thing about our God is that He is faithful even when we aren’t.”

Kai thought about the words “our God”. ‘I mean I guess we can be proud that we bear the Jesus-colored badge on our lapels,’ Kai thought. His studies in postmodernism and his conversations with new age types, Carl in particular, had made Kai humbly dubious about

making any claims to objective truth. He felt compelled to show off his broad, open-minded understanding.

“Our God certainly pulled through somehow. I’ve been thinking about that man. It’s interesting. Maybe I experienced him as Jesus because that’s how my subconscious recognizes God. Maybe it was an *inherent* divinity that I’ve learnt how to access by personifying him and using the power of belief to access the powers that are available to everyone. And like when I’m singing in church, I *do* get those electric shivers. Now they could be God, or my belief in that it is God is what is needed to unlock the unfathomable power of ourselves. ”

“Hmmm, a sort of Divine placebo effect?”

“Yeah man, yeah. Like mind over matter type thing. ‘cos I reckon God, or Truth, or whatever you call it manifests itself to different people in different ways. My friend once told me this sweet Indian story about a buncha blind guys who came across an elephant and tried to figure out what it was. The elephant represents like Truth, or God, you know. No one had ever seen an elephant at this point. So one of them grabs the elephant’s leg and says ‘The elephant creature, she is like a pillar’; another one goes for the tail and goes ‘No, you’ve got it wrong, the elephant is just like a rope’; and the one who feels the trunk says that the elephant most resembles a tree branch. They all contradict each other based on what part they grasp. See none of them were wrong, but they all had limited understandings and needed to put their truths together to get a clearer picture and avoid arguments. I dig that story because it shows how all truth is relative depending on the context you’re in. Each religion is a different blind guy.” Kai used a pompous hand gesture to indicate the conclusion of his explanation of all things mysterious. He then waited for the expected impressed look that was bound to pass over Luke’s face when he realized the kind of intellect that was in the room with him.

He got a different kinda look instead. Luke's face softened in what seemed like a look of recognition, excitement, and sorrow all rolled into one. "Ah yeah I also like that story," he began slowly, acknowledging Kai's choice. "You made a couple of very interesting points. One is about the fact that the Christian God might be a personification of our intrinsic abilities. Or a way of understanding reality that gives us access to the Transcendent's power. What that makes me think is that if the way to access that realm is through an acceptance of what Jesus has done then that says some fascinating things about our constitutional makeup. Like an innate need for submission and acknowledgement of guilt."

Luke locked himself in a distant gaze, expanding his attention into the furthest reaches of the realm outside the window. Then he snapped back into sharp focus, continuing onto his next train of thought, "And the question that comes up with the elephant story is: Wouldn't you have to know what a creature called the elephant *is* in order to understand the story? That would be the only way it makes sense. It seems to me that claiming that Truth is broken up into little facets like that, with each sector only grasping one facet, assumes a more total understanding of the situation than each of the sectors is trying to advocate. The view that 'all truth is relative' claims to be a larger truth statement than all the other religions are making. Which is ironic because the statement 'all truths are relative' is a truth claim itself."

He was right! Kai had never thought of it like that!

Luke paused for a moment, seemingly thinking these things through and letting Kai in on that thought process. Then he gently continued, "I guess one of the differences between religious truth claims and postmodernist ones is that the religious claims have integrity unto themselves. They admit to the exclusivity of their claims, while the relativist view is somewhat self-contradicting. I mean how can it be an objectively true statement to say that there are no

objectively true statements? In fact the claim of inclusivity, like 'accept that everyone is right or else you're small minded' is one of the most exclusive claims itself!"

Woah, he had a real good point. That's kinda what Kai had thought about Carl's mindset. Kai was following along, and was gobsmacked by this gangsta's razor-sharp rationality. He wanted to say something, but didn't know what.

"Yoh," Kai began, and then paused, "that's pretty deep. I hadn't noticed that internal contradiction there. I've gotta think about that more. I love stuff like that!"

"So do I!" Luke replied, recognizing a kindred spirit in Kai, "and there are few things that float my boat more than an invigorating thinking sesh."

If this guy was such a thinker and knew about postmodern relativism, why did he settle for being a pastor, such a seemingly grey profession amongst a world of color.

"What's so different about Jesus then? He's so last millennium," Kai said as non-confrontationally as he could muster. He began to feel disrespectful to ask, but quickly brushed off that encroaching British politeness.

Luke didn't seem offended. In fact he had a faint smile gracing his face that made it look like he welcomed this kind of debate.

"I'm glad you asked!" Luke beamed genuinely. He nuzzled into his recliner and dropped his shoulders even more, as if making himself at home in the subject. "For me Christianity explains the way that things are better than any other system of thought. Empiricism is obviously reductionistic; relativism is obviously too defiant of logic. The picture doesn't make sense without God. K so now we're in the realm of religion. And oh there's truth in almost all

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religions fo sho! And if their belief system leads them to adopt a way of life that's in line with Truth then they are a wonderful agent of change in civilization. We can learn from things like Buddhism's detachment from the world. I dig Zen's one-handed clap – that amuses me! Then there's Hinduism which emulates eclectic openness, Judaism's loyalty to law, Islam's submission. I've met some really wise people from a bunch of different faiths. I've met some wise atheists.

The Bible does talk about the fact that there is a level of understanding that is made available to all of thinking humanity called Common Grace. You can see this in a bunch of places, like Psalms, Romans, and Hebrews. This explains why there are so many atheists who live better moral lives than the vast majority of Christians including me!

But there is a unique level of revelation that revealed itself in the work of Jesus Christ. This is an upheaval of the conventional pattern of thought, legalism, which permeated even the Jewish mindset that Jesus was born into. Legalism is humanity's default mode of functioning – we have to earn things to get them. You try to earn your salvation through things like living a good life, sacrificing, meditation, and understanding.

Here's the thing: every other system of thought involves humanity's effort to reach up to God. There's only two ways that can go: if you're pulling it off as a result of your own effort then you look down on those who aren't. Like the Caste system of India. And the people who had a vested interest in keeping things in default mode are the ones who killed Jesus! Or the other alternative is that if you aren't pulling it off, you're plagued by guilt and shame. It's a lose-lose dichotomy.

Christianity is the only religion that claims that God came down to *us*. Which is splendid news man, 'cos our attempts to reach perfection are *never* gonna be good enough! It's like a bunch of us standing on one side of the Grand Canyon and trying to leap to the other side. The Buddhist bra may well get the furthest, who knows, but we all dismally take the Fall.

Christianity is a weight off your shoulders 'cos it's an acknowledgement that you're *not* good enough. But we've been adopted by God and become His children because of the price that Jesus had to pay in order to adhere to God's attribute of Justice. The Gospel is good news because salvation is a *gift!* Grace means it's undeserved. It's this paradigm shift that inevitably *leads* to good works, which flow out of us because we love God, not 'cos we have to do this stuff to be saved. Faith leads to works and understanding, and works and understanding lead to more faith. It's a beautiful, increasingly white snowball effect!"

This kinda made sense to Kai. It seemed to penetrate deeper than the theories his mind had been bouncing around, which always bounced back off reality with less energy. And at least the Christians admitted that they thought their worldview was exclusive, instead of implying it contradictorily through the false humility of Postmodernists.

Kai had other questions though. He maintained his alignment with being straight to the point, and wasn't gonna clown around with this educated monkey man. He was gonna bring up the subject of monkeys.

"That's deep man. But as a thinker, how do you reconcile rationality with Christianity? Like what about things like science and evolution, which seem to make sense. Christianity seems so archaic. Please take off your pastor hat man, I'm sure there are certain things you

wouldn't wanna say in your role as a pastor so as not to lead people astray. But I wanna hear what you *personally* think."

Luke grinned calmly, a gleam on the verge of leaping from his eye. The question must have tickled his fancy.

"Take off my pastor hat, I like that! It's very true that when I'm in my pastoral role there are huge responsibilities, and it's safest to adhere to tried and tested doctrine. The scandalous stuff happens behind the scene!" Luke winked. "I absolutely love making my intellect earn its keep. It would be patronizing to sit here and tell you I have all this figured out. Christianity makes the most rational sense to me, and has been proved true in my own life. But that's personal testimony that's hard to convey in any real depth. Ah yes, and I find the evolution issue fascinating! But see I really don't see rationality and Christianity as being mutually exclusive. In fact our era's obsession with either/or is one of the main obstacles to transcending this current paradigm."

Kai loved the word paradigm, and Luke's subtle criticism of Cartesian dualism. He attuned his listening even more as Luke continued, with the look of a man about to launch his debut album.

"Christianity has been ridiculous in the past, there's no denying that. Those big hats certainly weren't an indication of big brains! But then again it was no more ridiculous than the surrounding society was, from which the church unfortunately derived so much of its character. Sadly God and the insatiable drive for power *are* a case of either/or." He smiled. "But our culture has insisted on ditching the Truth that the Church is based on instead of just ditching a particular form of the institution. We've thrown out the baby with the bathwater, despite the

obvious signs that the little chap has thriving vital signs and would grow into a giant-slayer with a little nourishment! The past mistakes of Christianity are a reflection of its incarnation in human nature, and not its essence. It's like rejecting everything science has to offer because it was behind the creation of the atom bomb. No, that's a straw man fallacy that continues to be blown up relentlessly.

Actually you know, Christian thinkers have always been on the forefront of innovation and progression. I mean I'm talking guys like Newton, Galileo, uh... Roger Bacon... William of Ockham... Descartes too." There was a long pause here as Luke looked upward as if to plead for his compadre's names. Kai didn't mind waiting, as he never knew of Christianity's prominence in a field he always thought was counter to it, "...Blaise Pascal, Louis Pasteur," Luke continued, "You get the point. There are a bunch of others I can't think of off the top of my head. They certainly put the top of *their* heads to work; faith is not a hibernation of the cortex. Ok sure, Christianity *was* standard in their day, which would have inclined them to adhere to it, but still, it didn't strike them as contradictory to their rationality.

Evolution? Maybe! Science has expanded in leaps and bounds, and if our current understanding leads in the direction of evolution then maybe that sheds light on one of God's grand organizing principles. We also may only have a partial picture of it, so we must be careful to interpret new discoveries in light of Scripture. Both help advance the other. Science itself originally developed from the notion that an intelligent God must have designed an ordered universe. Even the word "cosmos" means order. It's only recently that we've pitted these allies against each other. United we stand, divided we fall."

Kai smiled at the little testimony to Luke's American roots thrown in at the end there. He wondered where we was from, but didn't want to break focus now. He was too interested in this

Christianity subject. Kai had read the New Testament through about 7 times in the last year, and was a good way into the Old Testament. He knew all too well that Genesis says that the world was made in 6 days. He had a theory about this, but had never told it to anyone. He didn't think they'd be interested. But now he felt like this space between Luke and him was safe, almost sacred, ground on which he could do no wrong. He was going to put it out there.

“Ya I agree my bru, I don't think that science and spirituality are mutually exclusive. I think Christianity might all be an analogy. I've got this theory,” Kai began. “Maybe parallel to physical evolution is an evolution of consciousness. Both need the other to be able to manifest. Systems within systems. 'cos surely mind and matter aren't separate like we used to think. It's old news that quantum physics has already proven that.”

He wanted to go off on a tangent about what quantum physics has proved about space and time, and tie it into lucid dreaming, but he decided to stick to his theory.

He continued, “Genesis is like an allegorical poem. It's got the structure of it with the repetition of refrains and stuff. It makes sense, right, 'cos if it was literal and the sun and moon were only made on the 4th day, it seems like a random way to measure time for the first 3 days. Consciousness is something that emerges as these systems advance through evolution. God's creation increases in complexity as the days progress - from water molecules, to plant life, to animals, and finally humans. Then once homo sapiens had built a brain that could handle our kinda sized cortex, the possibility of experiencing the Self emerged, which allowed the beginnings of an understanding about Other, God, to dawn with it. The system began to recognize itself. If you think of humans as cells, well cells began to have insights into the organizing power of the Brain.”

Here Kai wanted to digress again and go into how the recent connection of individual consciousnesses through the internet was like neurons in a brain connecting, which could signal the dawn of an unprecedented era. He shook himself free of that divergence, and criticized his mind for its spaghetti of tangents. He stopped talking and looked up to the right to regroup. "Ok so God finally revealed Himself to consciousness in a man named Adam. The rest of the species at the time remained rooted in their subcortical, animalistic structures. See, that kinda works, right?"

Before Luke had a chance to answer, Kai wanted to cover a couple more bases. "Oh ya, but there's two other options. Maybe we have misinterpreted our archeological findings 'cos we're looking through the lens of our current ideology, almost like people in Galileo's time justified their belief that the sun revolves around the earth 'cos they could see it doing so. Or the other possibility is that there is a completely different answer to these questions that I don't have the foggiest idea about!" He laughed out loud, catching himself a little off-guard.

Luke had had a twinkle in his eye the entire time Kai was talking. He waited a moment before he answered, smiling. "God reveals Truth to us through the use of our faculties, not by shutting those bad boys off. It's great to see you taking these intellectual journeys brochacho. Jesus Himself tells people to rock their discursive thinking in passages like Matthew 6:26. Compare yourself to the birds man, and soar.

"And like Paul instructs us to test the kinds of spirits that dwell in teachings; he goes on to say that any spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God. So it's good to see you grappling with these things. Contrary to popular opinion, pastors don't have all the answers." Luke's teeth flashed in his genuine grin. "But we do know Someone who does!

"I think there could well be a nugget of truth there. It needs to be mined though, mind," he added with a smirk. "Your theory ticks a couple of Biblical boxes, and it leaves a couple vacant. Like there *are* poetry texts in the Bible. It's more of a library than one single book actually. And you don't even need proof of address to get library membership! It holds many different literary genres from many different times and authors. But it has the common denominator of God's voice speaking through it.

Having homo sapiens around would explain how Cain was able to marry women from another tribe after he ran away, and also why Genesis goes on to refer to 'sons of men' and 'sons of God.' We all become sons of God by waking up to Him, recognizing our rebellion, and approaching Him through the light of the Gospel. This means letting go of the old primal, animalistic way of functioning which involved the primary pursuit of power, sex, and possession. It's not that these things are bad, as in Gnostic or Greek denial of the flesh, but they need to be redeemed. The Gospel is a reanimation of this life, a revitalization and return to its original purpose. It's almost like the next phase in evolution that Darwin would give a big bearded thumbs up to! And Jesus ushers that possibility in.

Just be careful here my African brudda. It's important to separate *speculation* from *revelation*. It's fun to think about these things and bounce them off peeps. But just make sure that you *are* continuously bumping them up against solid rock, and people who represent solid Rock. That's how stones get polished you know, friction lad, friction. "

Kai felt validated in his theory. He knew enough about Christianity though to know that some of these things would probably be deemed heretical by the more orthodox types. Was Luke not going to comment on his statement that Christianity is one big analogy? Kai wanted to test that by being a little more confrontational about it.

“Ya sometimes I feel like it’s easier to just dismiss any fact behind Christianity completely. The allegory might work, but it kinda seem like it’s just an attempt to reconcile these things by shoving them into each other and coming up with a deformed hybrid that doesn’t bare any of the genetics of either of its parents. Like if we interpret Genesis allegorically, why not interpret everything else in the same way and dismiss it all as a fable?”

Kai realized how schizophrenic his own divergence of opinions seemed, but relaxed his shoulders when he saw that Luke understood that he was trying to understand it from both sides of the divide.

“Nicely said!” Luke acknowledged. “Hey brother, if we could understand everything about Life, we would be God ourselves! These meager attempts of us babies trying to understand the stock market are just a manifestation of our inadequacies. Inadequacies that God is well aware of. I think He smiles upon the daunting tasks we try to create! But seek and ye will find. God invites inquisition. Yes every time we come against something seemingly contradictorily, a part of ourselves enters a differentiated split. You can refuse to enter this, but then you stagnate in your faith. If you trust God and let Him lead you, you will come into a more complete understanding, where seeming paradoxes merge. He makes us His children in a heartfelt moment, and then takes a lifetime to reveal his magnificently complex role as a parent.”

Luke’s gentle smile and humble response disarmed Kai as he continued, “Most of the time, viewing the Bible through the context of its various books answers the questions about its intention. It certainly is not *all* allegorical, and passages like 1 John 4:2 make that blatant. But again that line between allegorical and factual may not be as black and white as we think. *Life* is largely allegorical, and we may discover that the physical realm is a manifestation of something more abstract. So many passages in the Bible are both literal *and* allegorical. Like in the Moses

story of the Old Testament, right, the blood of the lamb over the doors of God's people allowed death to pass over them. But it killed all the other firstborns. That blood of the Lamb is further revealed in the New Testament to be Jesus' blood that spared us from eternal death. Both of these stories really happened in time and space. Both of them speak to the same Truth. God's work in Jesus is just further revelation of these same messages."

"Woah, that's intense," Kai sighed as he smiled.

He literally felt the pressure increasing in his brain. He loved talking like this, and he had a soul connection with Luke, but he needed time to digest what had been said before experiencing too much pain from a head-first fall down the Christianity rabbit hole.

"Dude," he said, "this is epic, and I'd love to meet up like this again. When next are you free?"

"I love it bruv. How about next week? We could go for a walk and check some sights, thereby checking two boxes with one swift stride?"

"Nice!" Kai barked at both Luke's wording and the idea. And it was settled. Yet Kai's mind was anything but.

This enchanted rabbit hole reality was both riveting and overwhelming. There was way too much to learn about, yet there was nothing that invigorated Kai more than exploring these things. He felt in a world of his own, like a bobbing boat with no anchor, drifting sporadically through the ocean of human experience. He knew all too well that there were sharks in this ocean, and suddenly he missed home.

He sent JP a Facebook message letting him know some of the consciousness journeys he had been undertaking and asking how life in sub-Saharan Dark Continent was. JP took a couple of days to reply, and his wording was brief. Kai gave him the benefit of the doubt though, knowing that internet access was hard for him. Most likely he had paid R5 for 15 minutes at the internet café on the main road. JP mentioned a reggae song that he told Kai to look up, and also to research Haile Selassie 1. Kai was surprised at his abundant usage of the Cape Town cool kid lingo. It was the verbage that was a passport to conversationality with the self-proclaimed elite crew of the southern suburbs. You know, the sponsored surfers, the rugby jocks, the avant-garde artsy types who frequented Kirstenbosch gardens. These latter hippie types were trying to breathe life into their non-conformist, dismissive protests against society. The results of this approach were a few decades buried beneath their bare muddied feet. JP's use of the language made Kai wonder about how long genuine African heritage can go unadulterated by the Westernized versions of cool that silently squash idiosyncrasies.

CHAPTER 13: Portals are not Toys

The darkness came in like a fog, with a barely perceptible eeriness that began to envelop the world that was full of sunlight minutes ago. Cold, hair-raising shivers crept into Kai's Cornish cottage, and began caressing his carefree girlfriend too. Her experiences were his first indication that the circle wasn't a place that you went to and then left. The circle was a sphere that opened up and spewed forth alternate realities. Once you've opened that portal it's near impossible to shut. Spirits in the non-physical realms are always looking for doorways to this plane, as their subtle vibrations can't move coarse physical vibrations around like other physical

coarse ones can. They mostly need humans to manipulate the physical plane. When a person begins to open these portals, which Kai had been knowingly doing in his meditations on his indigo third eye chakra, his lucid dreams, and most recently his involvement in spiritual channeling circles, it's like a light comes on in the subtle planes, attracting both moths and sinister nocturnal creatures. The first warning of this attraction manifesting was a loud bang on the door of Kai's cottage around 10pm one summer Monday evening.

The bang was laden with panic, and the smell of fear yanked Kai out of his reading bubble in bed. In split seconds he was unbolting the door and being pushed aside by his white-eyed girlfriend who dove into the bedroom like a mouse ducking into its hole to narrowly avoid the claws of an owl. Thoroughly swirled 180 degrees from Kai's downward journey toward slumber, he followed Bella into the bedroom. "What happened, what's going on?!" Kai thirsted.

"You made this happen, you did! With all your spiritual this, and circle that. Now you've made them spirits come after me!"

"What do you mean, what happened?" Kai hesitantly enquired, a tinge of guilt already starting to poise itself for pouncing from the lower portion of his chest.

"I was just walking home down the hill all in me own lil world when I see something in the corner of my eye. It was a man Kai, a dark man standing with his hands in his pockets and a scarf wrapped around his neck. One of them thick woolen ones. Dressed like he was in Antarctica he was, even though today was one of the hottest days of the summer so far. His hair was blowing, I'm sure of it, hard. And there wasn't a breath of wind! He was just glaring at me with these silver eyes and I felt fear like I have never before. He was like what, 20m away from me at this point, and he could of got to me within a couple of seconds. I needed you then. I went

for me phone to try and call you and I yelled 'Excuse me, can I help you?' He didn't answer. He was so still it was like he couldn't talk. My heart skipped a beat 'cos he just kept glaring at me, frozen there except for that bloody waving hair. Just as I was about to call you he opened his mouth and let out this silent scream. Ewwww," she shuddered, "it was like at a pitch that only dogs can hear, and it was like I had a slow-mo view of it all. I felt freezing cold all of the sudden. I feel cold now thinking about it." Kai put his arm around her. "I looked down at my phone to call you and when I looked up he was gone. Gone! There was nowhere to go Kai! He was far away from anything he could have ducked behind. People don't just disappear Kai! This has gone too far; you're not going to *one* more of those bloody dead people meetings!"

A line had been crossed and Kai knew it. He wasn't feeling particularly comfortable at the circle anyway. Also, his mom's friend Sophia had said something interesting in an email that Kai thought might be a message from God. She had told him that dispersing his attention like a laser reduces the power of the beam. He didn't know why she said it, but he took it to mean that if he cut out the circle from his life, he could channel more power into other growth pursuits. Could he just stop going to the circle though? He'd go one last time to make sure he left things cool and didn't make them put some kind of a voodoo curse on him. He'd pull some lame excuse out of his bucket and then be rid of that realm forever.

The next morning was a Tuesday and brought with it daylight, as well as a fading of the feeling of gravity that had overcome the two of them the night before. The normality of the day, and the busyness of the bustling Cornish tourists was an anthem of sanity, over screaming any morbid glimpses of fantasy. Still, Kai knew that the Circle wasn't a good thing, and began preparing for what he was going to tell Ray on Thursday. That day was dull, cloudy. Barely worth it.

Wednesday morning arose with a symphony of seagull squawks and the smell of pasties baking. As these Cornish paraphernalia sprinkled Kai's half-asleep state with English summer seasoning, Kai was awoken by Bella coming back to the bedroom a couple of minutes after he knew she had already left for her morning shift.

"Kai," she forcefully shoved him, "listen to this. Last night I had a dream that some guy was sleeping in a chair outside our cottage. There were these z's coming from his head, you know how they do in them cartoons. I didn't think nothing of it. Then I start walking to work this morning and guess what's sitting outside our cottage? The same chair from my dream! It wasn't there last night when I came home! I would have seen it. 100% it wasn't there."

"What? That's weird...that's way weird. It's like you had that knowledge delivered to you in a dream. Do you think the guy was real?"

Kai could tell that he hadn't selected correctly from the options of approach, as his intrigued line of questioning was met with a glaring shut down. "I'm sorry Bella," Kai backtracked into validation, "that must have been really scary for you. This is too much, I'll close these portals. Trust me k?"

Bella turned her back and walked out, her posture a combination of anxiety and sadness. A heaviness entered Kai's heart. His actions were causing someone he cared about to be frightened, and not comfortable in her own home. He was hurting her, and increasing the distance in their relationship. 'It was interesting though,' he allowed himself think, 'how the astral plane gave hints of physical manifestations. Interesting, yes.'

Kai's head sank back into his feather pillow as the light cracked through his white blinds, baring with it the world that was awake and vibrant with color out there. Those now familiar

sounds of tourist tussle, seagull screeches, and the consistent sigh of the sea drew him back into a calm and dreamy state. Deep darkness enveloped him as he fell backwards in his mind, beginning the plummet towards that vibrant potentiality. But something pulled him back. Something in the lounge; he was sure he heard it. Suddenly he was alert.

He opened his eyes and couldn't see anything. The void that met his listening added credibility to the notion that he hoped was the truth: that it was just his imagination. He lay listening attentively for a moment.

"Kai," came the deep rumble of a sound from through the corridor. Cold air rushed into Kai's lungs, flinging open his eyelids in fright. Fright quickly turned to terror as Kai realized that no sound could come out of his mouth! And then that he couldn't move!

Panic set in as the voice once again called his name, and the sound was coming closer to his bedroom now. His heart pounded against the jail cell of his immobile chest as he lay there like a paralyzed lamb for the slaughter.

A shadow appeared in the doorway, a mist of a presence. An audible, tangible entity. Kai's eyes gaped in response to the increasing claustrophobia. There was nowhere he could go; there was nothing he could do. Dread - sheer horrifying dread!

"Jesus help me!" Kai blurted in his mind in panicked urgency. A second passed. Then rich darkness exploded into the room seemingly from the fabric of the environment itself.

Quiet. Peace.

A glowing white-gold figure appeared at the top of descending steps in the top left corner of the room. As the figure majestically made its way down into the room, serenity fused his body with release and he sank back into the fluffy feather pillow.

The next thing Kai knew he had awoken to the homely presence of the entity who had been calling from the lounge. Jesus was nowhere to be seen, but His peace was still tangible. The entity was seated on the window sill above Kai's left shoulder, poised like an old friend ready to catch up. The conversation flowed gracefully and organically, as the entity revealed intricate details about the composition of life itself. Kai forgot everything that the entity explained to him. At least consciously. On another level he never shook the insights that this ancient, and yet troubled soul had imparted on him.

Thursday night rolled around and Kai was eager to share his astral plane communion with the spiritual gang. Upon further reflection Kai had become less and less sure what side of the hypnogogic divide he was on. He may have been in an alpha state on the awake side of the portal, or he may have just crossed the portal and have been alert enough to experience the dream as reality. Either way, it was as real as anything else he'd ever experienced in his life. The conversation was cloudy, yes, but the blanket layer of clouds that hang over Table Mountain don't daunt the solidness of the rock below it. He realized that he couldn't move 'cos of sleep paralysis – the body's insurance that our dreams don't get acted out every night. An insurance that had always provided only partial coverage in Kai's life, as his sleep walking escapades had begun in childhood, but then fizzled out. Passionate sleep talking and carousing around while sitting up in bed were a nightly occurrence since his first mystical episode with the dog though. He *wished* he could remember what the entity said. Or that he even remembered the name that

the most recent physical manifestation of that spirit bore, but he couldn't. Ray was going to ask him, and what was he going to say?

"So what did he tell you?" Ray predictably poked.

"I don't know man, I can't remember."

"You will remember, and it will change your life. He will probably come back."

Kai wasn't sure he wanted the entity to come back. In fact he knew he *didn't*, despite its apparent benevolence. He let the comment pass, and each of the characters clustered around the table ooo'ed and ahhh'ed at his connection with the other realm.

Susan, the sad lady who Kai liked, cautiously peeped up. It seemed like Kai's personal story had given her unofficial permission to open up. She shared that her 5 year old son had been having night terrors for the last week, seeing ghastly faces at his bedroom window taunting him that he was going to die. "You're going to die, you're going to *die*," their fanged mouths mouth spew from their distorted faces. Enough to leave any 55 year old terrified, let alone the lil half-a-decader! The room went silent. Kai looked to Ray for his interpretation. Surely this was a big deal. Was he going to touch on the kind of realms that the involvement with the circle clearly opened them up to? The room awaited his response with bated breath.

"He's just making it up," Ray said casually. The casualness being blatantly faked, Kai thought as he assessed his rigid body language. Susan gently insisted that her son has never made up anything like this before, a look of increasing desperation beginning to appear on her worn face. "He has been so traumatized by this Ray! It's happening all the time! Look, he even drew these pictures of them."

“Boys will be boys,” Ray brushed her off.

Kai's defenses shot up as the discerning spirit in him got suspicious. ‘Ok wait, what is this blatant denial of a demonic encounter? Ray of all people finds meaning in the smallest of chance events, and yet is dismissing this event as make believe and not relevant? This doesn't make sense. What's he trying to hide? The look of anguish and destitution was sprawled all across Susan's face as she sunk back into her chair. Something's not right here; Kai squinted as if funneling his deductions down a dangerous ditch. “Jesus please protect me,” he thought to himself.

The meditation that night was actively empty, despite Jez having visions of flowers. Her sing song voice seemed to blatantly defy the anguish that the Susan was still suppressing. Kai didn't feel comfortable, and something Luke said popped into his head: test the spirits; if they acknowledge Jesus Christ came in the flesh they are of God.

“Hey Ray man, I've been wondering what you guys think about Jesus. Who was he?” Kai tried to disguise his test as light-heartedly as he could beneath the guise of curiosity.

“Jesus. Yes,” Ray drew out the words reluctantly. “Jesus is thought to be the first human to achieve Christ consciousness, and is an inspiration to us all,” came Ray's slow and deliberate reply.

“So you think He actually lived in history?” Kai attempted not to use words ‘came in the flesh’ in case Ray or the others picked up on his line of thought.

“It's not important whether he *was* real, in the sense that you and I are real. It's that he *is* real. Christ consciousness is a state that is open for anyone to attain.” Ray looked around the

room. Jordy gave Kai a curious look. The others gazed in his direction, seemingly perplexed, or maybe bored.

Jez piped up proudly in a matter of fact tone, "When you recognize the divinity within yourself, you realize that you have had Christ consciousness all along."

Ray nodded encouragingly. The room resumed its stare at Kai. In his mind, they suddenly started to morph like the party guests did in his lucid nightmare. The ether shifted aside and revealed a wanted gremlin where an eccentric person sat minutes before. Kai prayed again "Lord protect me". He mirrored Ray's earlier casualness and calmly said "Hmmm, that's interesting."

The last 20 minutes of the session felt like nails on a chalk board. Out of Kai's peripheral vision he saw the others glare at him until he would glance in their direction. He finally drove off into the haunted night, knowing that he would never be back.

CHAPTER 14: The Simple Charm of Black and White

The defenses that Kai had put up started karate chopping various aspects of his spiritual pursuit out the door. He knew for a fact now that there was darkness inherent in certain avenues of pursuit, and he wasn't down to be the next feline killed by curiosity. The tempting increase in energy that Lady Curiosity facilitates bore too much of a resemblance to the water that slowly boiled the ignorant frog. Almost all other kinds of exploration were cool, but when your ventures start flooding you with Lucifer's fruit, it's time to pull the plug on that frog bath! In the interests of brutal "cutting off the hand that causes you to sin",

Kai dropped anything that even had the mild aroma of sorcery, which the Bible clearly condemned. He cut out his yoga practice after learning that it is worship of the Hindu god Ishwara. He always used to tell himself that his Salutes to the Sun were merely a stretch, and would make sure not to do them in the direction of the sun so as not to be worshipping it.

Back then panentheism was much more attractive than it was seeming now. He used to want anything but conventional Christianity, because of the nonconformist in him, and his disillusionment with the Christian tradition thus far. Buddhism had seemed great 'cos it was Eastern and bore similarities to psychology. Gnosticism and esotericism were fascinating 'cos of the spin they put on traditional doctrine. But they all fell short.

Although his awareness and mindfulness had clearly improved, there was a bottomless pit inside of him that no amount of gained skills could satiate. Plus, he had tasted some of their fruit. And like the serpent's apple (and the apples of countless Disney fairytale witches), the outside was hypnotically shiny and scrumptious-looking, but the inside was rotten and filled with lethal poison. He needed to ask Luke what he thought about all of that in more depth on their walk.

Kai had paralleled the transition of one of his favorite bands, Sum 41. Together they went from a light-hearted punk based on frivolity, to a meaning-searching non-conformity, and now to "finding glamor in the dark side." Kai was ready to break away from that, who knows what path Sum 41 wanted to take. Anyway, Avril Lavigne ended up divorcing the lead singer Derrick.

*"I've seen many a face, from young until old,
I've stolen their faith and have broken their souls.*

*Was here before Christ had forgave you your sins,
And paid your price and set your faith within.” – Sum 41, Speak of the Devil*

Kai picked up Luke at his house in the early afternoon. He was surprised when Luke suggested it, but seeing Luke's kids, and wife, and dog, went a long way to demystifying the brother, and the experience had added a new layer of rapport to their relationship. Kai loved hearing about Luke's struggles with being a dad, and juggling that with his pastoral role and personal pursuits. He really seemed to love his family, and he loved his dog. Kai resonated with his humanness. There was an open genuineness in Luke's demeanor that generated a disarming peace. Kai was enjoying drifting along the raw conversational path that meandered along with their trail up a Cornish mountain. The spot was Luke's idea, and like a lot of Luke's ideas, was a good one. Blackberries dotted the overgrown bushes that organically spread onto the barely trodden path. It led them alongside sheep pastures and through the midst of deep green forests. Rain from two days ago still saturated certain glops of mud that they had to adventurously maneuver around.

When the path stretched out into a climactic blind horizon, Luke became visibly excited. “Wait til you see what's over this bend,” he couldn't help let out. Kai couldn't wait. It seemed like their mile and half hike had almost been a metaphor of Kai's own journey – sometimes through sections of juicy fruit, sometimes avoiding pitfalls of sinking sand, often hidden from the world by a layer of green.

An excerpt from one of William James' books that Kai had read recently nudged its way into his mind:

"When I walk the fields, I am oppressed now and then with an innate feeling that everything I see has a meaning, if I could but understand it. And this feeling of being surrounded with truths which I cannot grasp amounts to indescribable awe sometimes. . . . Have you not felt that your real soul was imperceptible to your mental vision, except in a few hallowed moments?"

He hadn't wanted to break the unperturbed revelry of their experience by bringing up his serious questions just yet. In the back of his mind he was all too aware of his ability to lead the interaction in a certain direction, with or without the use of Glamor. But he felt like both their mutual physical journey, as well as his spiritual journey were coming to a crescendo, and he was eagerly awaiting the explosion.

Kai's vision opened out like caged doves being released into a panoramic view of the rolling English countryside. It was the Beautiful Palace scene from Pilgrim's Progress, and the landscape instantly renewed Kai's spirit in the same way that Bunyan's had been refreshed at the Houghton House centuries earlier. A rich array of colors invigorated the soul and made the air smell sweet. Birds glided effortlessly, silently, cared for. As the rich, hilly landscape bowed out before the two pilgrims like a bright green wrinkled tablecloth, the two voyager's spiritual appetite caused them both to salivate, and it seemed only natural now to talk about God.

"How could our appreciation for nature's grandeur be a by-product of an eat or be eaten evolution? The fact there is beauty surely proves that Beauty exists," Kai calmly let out the words into the gentle breeze, neither of the boys taking their eyes off of the view. It was almost a rhetorical statement directed at no one in particular, but Kai was glad that Luke was there to absorb it with him.

Luke sighed in acknowledgement and remained quiet for a few moments. “The penny seems to drop and it all makes slightly more cents when we get up here, huh.”

That reminded Kai, “Ya seriously. Sometimes I feel like life is this kinda mountain that we climb up. There are all these different paths to take to reach the top - like different religions, spiritual practices...even drugs can give you glimpses of this view. The experiences are different on the way up, but when we get to the top we all see the same bird's eye view. And then we go on to approach life from that renewed perspective, you know. That's why all the major world religions, and even introspective atheists, understand that it's stuff like peace, and love, and generosity that matters.”

“Huh, yeah. I like the idea of life as this upward journey. And the view does make more and more sense as the height allows you to see how life's various aspects interconnect. I agree that some drugs can be a kind of teleportation tool that drops you higher up for short periods of time. The way I see it though, there are mountain lions lurking at the top, and only by building the muscle and experience gained from the actual climb itself, are you able to defend yourself from being devoured. I'm talking things like developing faith, and perseverance, and courage.” He paused. “Also, I think there's a richer understanding that comes from seeing the interconnection increasing gradually as you climb as opposed to bam, being granted this vision. It's too easy to misinterpret a sudden burst of information like that. I guess a shortcut to accessing that kind of knowledge has always been appealing though. Thing is, Genesis shows how disastrous the consequences can be.”

Kai wanted to grow in his level of faith and to see what fruits obedience would bring. In spite of having to repeatedly squish his old way of thinking back into its square-shaped box, Kai

managed to follow through on a lot of his conscience-led impulses over the next few weeks. One such follow-through changed his course in the following way:

He and his girlfriend were in Venice in late November, the lego-blocked buildings and other-worldly ambience flooding their senses with mystique. There was one thing that was missing in their magic potion, one thing they were hoping to do in Venice. It was the same thing that every Kodak-bearing tourist wants to do in Venice: be rowed around and sung to by some stranger in a hat! Kai longed for the opportunity to smile up at the poor striped-shirted Gondolier who would be forced to use his inadequately-numbered single oar to careen them off blissfully in the direction of their choice, namely: superfluous luxury!

But cash was callously cutting up Kai's chance of carrying out his craving for some cruising. A cursory examination of their limited funds had silently squashed his hopes of being able to afford a gondola ride. Squashed his hopes effortlessly with a waterless squish! They couldn't do it. They still had to do Rome on their budget, and the exchange rate of the €80 price tag equaled unaffordable. It was a disappointing decision, 'cos their expectations of Venice were laden with the vision of a sublime trip down the river in stereotypical Venetian style.

Walking away from the gondoliers dejected, they stopped into a little Italian café to get a compensatory ice-cream. That's when it got interesting. Fate stepped up to the plate as the flustered waitress/cashier gave Kai change for a €100 note instead of the €10 he had handed her!

He didn't notice this until his face was sufficiently stuffed with vanilla consolation. The discovery made the ice cream all the more sweet! No way, it really seemed like God was delivering them a timely dose of providence to allow them to fulfill their gondola dream! It was almost exactly the amount needed, including the tip! Too much of a coincidence to be a

coincidence! Kai's heart sped up in excited appreciation. Is this cash a gift from God? After all, it *was* her own mistake. I mean how do you mistake a red €10 note for a green €100 one? If she was a guy Kai might assume he was one of the like 8% with red-green colorblindness, but girls had what, like a 0.5% chance? "Fair enough, finders keepers," Kai's square-shaped thinking assured him.

Instantly though, there was that annoying silent tug telling him what he should do. He knew all too well that some restaurants force their employees to pay for their mistakes out of their own pocket, and Kai had gone home from a waitering shift in the red, and with a red face, one too many times. Reluctantly, and begrudgingly, he returned the money.

To his disgust, the girl merely said, "Oh, thank you," in passing, and went on to resume her flustered waitressing antics. "How unappreciative! What a waste!" he grumbled as his homeward journey rubbed salt in his wound. Salt from the semi-salted water of the Grand Canal no doubt, the one that was consistently spouting beaming fresh-off-the-boat tourists! Not a good day.

Then, as soon as his subconscious sulking subsided, before the sun set on that same day, it happened. His phone rang – an unrecognized number. Kai seldom picked up unknown numbers, 'cos he resented the intrusion of marketing calls. But he had submitted a long-shot application for a live-in caring position a while back, and hoped it might be feedback about that. He had zilch experience though, so his hopes were minimal. But faith as minimal as a mustard seed can move mountains, and it turned out the phone call *was* the care agency, and they *did* offer him the job! A mountainous proposition of a job too, one that ended up earning Kai £12,000 over the next 4 months! The same £12,000 that enabled him to go on a year-long

around the world trip. Needless to say, the gondoliers could keep their square-shaped boats! God had squashed one cruise, and in response to Kai's obedience, launched another!

CHAPTER 15: Life and Death

Kai couldn't believe the money that he was making helping his new old buddy out. As palliative care, Kai's role was basically to make Bill as comfortable as possible during his transition to the afterlife.

"Lord please help me to be a blessing to others," he prayed.

It was no easy feat making Bill comfortable, as he was bedridden, blind, partially deaf, and had Emphysema. The oxygenated air that flowed through plastic tubes into his lungs was richer than the regular stuff, and it seemed like God was in the business of ensuring that Bill had as rich of a phase out as possible.

Bill's 83 years had been impoverished of spirituality, and Kai was a unfolding treasure trove of information for a mind that was suddenly earnestly seeking answers. Kai didn't exactly have the answers himself, but he did have some of the pieces of the puzzle, so that blind Bill could bravely build his own boat that would brisk him away across the Eternal river. And the exchange was mutually beneficial, as Kai got to experience a unique perspective of a life seen in hindsight. Bill's insistence that it was his relationships and the impact he had on the world that mattered most confirmed that Kai wasn't about to climb a ladder of success that had been leaning on the wrong building all along.

Their discussions were riveting, and Bill's humble assessment of his own condition served to further awaken Kai's heart.

“Even though I know I’m 83. And I know you’re 23. It feels like you’re older than me somehow,” he croaked as he clutched the support rod above his bed, in unison with the one that was sitting in the chair *beside* his bed.

“Wow man, that’s hectic that you feel like that. Why do you think it is?”

“I feel like you’re an old soul, and you’ve been looking into things that I am only now realizing I should have looked into long ago.” He took a couple of gasping breaths, his lungs only inflating part way. “I’m scared of what’s going to happen. Who knows where I am going. I have this vision...” he lay silently staring glazed eyed at the wall in front of him. “I have this vision that comes to me every time I doze off. I’m at the bottom of this flight of stairs. I know that when I reach the top I will pass on. Every now and then I take a step. But I’m too scared. You know?”

Kai was honored. He was honored that their rapport had reached the point where Bill was willing to make himself vulnerable to what was essentially an employee of his. Kai knew enough about England’s cultural ideas involving the role of males, and the stiff-upper-lip approach that permeated the Pommie ethos, particularly amongst the older generation. He was honored too that God had granted him such a privileged role in someone’s life, and the opportunity to explore real death that Kai had explored in his own imagination countless times.

“I can only imagine,” Kai gently validated, “That’s really interesting that you see that flight of stairs, I’m fascinated with stuff like that.”

Bill let his grip on the support pole loosen, and it was apparently an outward gesture of an inward relaxing that broke open the floodgate of spiritual experiences Bill hadn’t been able to

share with anyone up to this point. Kai had seen the interaction when his sons or wife came in. The weather was only *so* fascinating. It made Kai sad.

"I get visitors too," Bill continued as Kai moved closer to the edge of his chair, "I had one just last night. A lady, I think I knew her once in my job as a joiner. She didn't say anything. She just hovered there in the corner of the room. I think you're making an impact here. The other day I got taken away by some pygmies from Africa." Bill waited for Kai's dismissal or affirmation.

"No way! Where did they take you?"

"They said they knew you anyway. But they took me on a boat. Across a river. A rather large river that one couldn't see to the other side of unless one was at least half way across it. I wanted to go back when we reached that halfway point. And instantly I found myself back in my bed." His body language said that he had more to say, so Kai waited with bated breath.

"What do you think it's like, you know, dying?"

Kai's impulse was to further explore the pygmy story, and to find out how they knew *him*. But he didn't want to dismiss Bill's heartfelt question, despite having no idea how to answer. "Geez man, I really don't know hey. I don't think we *can* know. Like how are you gonna describe what life is like to a fetus? How can driving forces like ambition and hunger and love be described to a creature who has been in a water bubble that sheltered it from vision and thirst? I kinda feel like it will be a similar kind of transition. That would make sense, right? Maybe also that's why Christians talk about a new birth, 'cos we're born into the realm of the eternal, even if we only have a vague knowledge of it."

“Like birth you say...like birth. Jolly well then. But in all the births I've been privy to, I've never seen one where the baby doesn't look in agony. I guess half of it is the shock, the change.”

“The fear of the unknown is one of humanity's greatest adversaries. It stops us from being all we can be in life, and dreading the new dawn of death.” Kai stopped, remembering that Bill was a creature of habit like so many of the English of his generation. He had gone the way of the tried and tested, inheriting his father's profession and taste in oats. That same teaspoon of butter, teaspoon of sugar and pinch of salt had been the taste of Bill's entire life. And Kai wasn't about to make him regret the monotony.

One morning Bill's shell lay where his friend once was. Kai almost immediately regretted not spending more time with him, not praying with him. Kai regretted the callousness inherent in trying to teach Bill to calm himself so that he wouldn't incessantly ring his buzzer to call Kai to hold his hand. He needed the warmth of human touch. Sure the calming techniques Kai had implemented worked, but they were cold. Cold and empty. He had taught Bill the power of affirmations, and now the croaky sound of “peace and tranquility” being repeated over and over still echoed off the empty-feeling walls. Kai had a dream that night that Bill was grateful for his friendship. Kai joined Bill in a subtle smile as he watched him silently and peacefully arriving on the shores of the New World, a Columbus who dared to climb the stairs.

At Bill's funeral, Kai read a poem he wrote for his friend:

As seasons change, it might seem strange that leaves fall to the ground

Our numbered days may fade away, but the wheel of life is round

Like flowers drop their fertile seeds then dissolve into the earth,

I'd so appreciate comments! telljoshstuff@gmail.com

we all will wake from these painful dreams into a glorious new birth

For all its worth, Bills better off, and closer than your breath

He's just gone first to pave your path in the realm of light and rest.

CHAPTER 16: Everywhere You Go, There You Are

Funds acquired, fun was now required! Kai had already arranged the destinations on his £1200 around the world trip. They say if you only know one culture you know no culture at all. Kai was intent on dipping his hands in the multiple cookie jars of global human experience, sampling a sweet little morsel of each of human culture's unique ways of understanding this thing called life. By doing that, he would have more options of thought patterns to choose from, and so be more conscious when it came time to make important life decisions.

The benefits of travel can be verified by the ironic fact that Kai's African roots never grew down so deeply as when he withdrew them from the soil and scattered them in the ocean through his travels. Sometimes life needs to be temporarily lost in order to be wholly found. Kai was noticing Scriptural truth mirrored in practical reality more and more. Yip, the sky is mirrored in the ocean, and both require in-depth knowledge of the currents in order to ride them effectively. And Kai was planning on doing some efficient ocean riding on his travels, that's for sure! After 4 months without surfing, he felt like a dried up prune, and couldn't wait to exchange this dry persona for the water-soaked prune kind rather!

His first stop was South Africa, just as South Africa was his first stop on the planet when he made his debut to existence, and he always felt soul-restored after reconnecting with his roots. Africa's healing atmosphere became more apparent which each successive visit home, and this one took the dirt cake!

For an unknown reason, Precious, his family's maid, was particularly happy to see him.

"Eish!" she exclaimed. "How you gone for loooong time. There's something bout you now. Where you bin?"

"Hiy Precious, I've been all over. But you know what hey? I love being home so much! I never realized how unique our culture is here. Hey I've been into dreams lately, and I wondered if you have ever been to a sangoma?"

"Hibo wena!" she started. Then she wound up the cord of the vacuum and brushed off her pink tracksuit pants. She looked like she had just got out of bed. But you should see her when she's dressed up, like every Sunday for church. She's an ornamental masterpiece, immaculately groomed. She sat down on the top of the couch. It heaved under her weight. "Hibo," she continued.

Then she went on to tell Kai intricate stories about her Xhosa culture and the role of sangomas. It turned out that her own grandmother was one, and that Precious herself had got a call when she was 14. She wanted to marry though, and had turned it down. It made her violently sick for a year. This was typical, she explained. "But oooh," her eyes widened and her hand gestures could no longer be held back as she retold her grandmother's stories about a trip to an underwater city for her initiation. Kai had *dreamt* about an underwater city nights before! Her grandmother disappeared for 10 days – no one knew where she was. This was quite the feat

in a small, closed community. On her return she held her head high, her cheeks adorned with white streaks of paint, and haunting symbols painted all over her body. After that she could make it rain; she could call down thunder and lightning by mixing certain ingredients together.

Kai had got Precious on a roll now, and she stood up to make full room for her escalating hand gestures.

"Me myself," she said, "I have the dreams. I have all the dreams. Haw. This one time I dreamt lottery numbers, all da lottery numbers, and da bonus. Ahhhh hai, but I forgot, I kick myself, I forget two. I still get five numbers though, win R2000.

"Wow!" Kai said. "That really is amazing Precious! Geez, you should keep working on that one!"

"I *am*!" she insisted.

She went on to tell Kai how her brother in law had a sick 4 year old son. He was going to die; Western doctors could do nothing. One Saturday night he had a vivid dream that instructed him to take his child to a certain minister's wife who was going to walk past their house on the way to church at 9am the next day. He had never seen the lady in his life, but recognized her from his dream when she meandered down his road. She had had a dream too, and took her boy to her husband. The boy was cured. He is now 16 and on the way to priesthood. Precious had asked him what happened, and he had told her that he himself had had a dream. In his dream he was instructed to make tea for a group of tribal elders inside a half snake, half fish creature. On their approval of his obedience, they informed him that he will now be cured. And he was.

The stories became more disturbing. She told of a lady who was ill because she had refused the call to sangomahood just like Precious herself had. He was in the midst of a violent

seizure, foaming at the mouth, when she told those around her that there were invisible people in the corner of the room trying to kill her. They had been watching her for weeks. She said she was sorry and that she didn't do anything to them to deserve this. Then she died.

Lastly, there was a high school kid who stabbed 4 people to death with a sword, claiming that the devil made him do it.

All this was ringing a little close to home as Kai thought about his borderline schizophrenia and his blackouts.

“Wow Precious, you've got some amazing stories. Thanks for sharing them with me. I've gotta go help Sean with his wedding stuff now, but I'll see you soon. Sala Kahle.”

Another reason Kai went home was to be best man at his buddy's wedding. Thing is, he'd always noticed an unhealthy domineering tendency to his fiancé, and a desire to squash out the eccentricities that made Morgan. Kai noticed a feigned seriousness in Morgan's mindset now that he had her. Once a dummer in a successful Christian band, he was now essentially an atheist. Once a fellow pirate-singing floor-swimmer, he now seemed content to board the HSS cruiseliner headed straight for dull land, no swimming stops along the way. But Kai was slowly growing in humility, and thought ‘Well maybe *I'm* the one with the issue – maybe I'm some kinda commitment phobe and am just disappointed that my friend is deciding to grow up.’

It came to a head two days before the wedding when 3 potent ingredients of his blonde fiance's combined in a cocktail that made a caring friend want to throw up after just one drink – a solid pour of OCD tendencies, shaken with a dollop of Bridezilla complex, and thoroughly blended with her authoritarianism – the concoction inevitably exploded all over Morgan and Kai.

In the car ride home that day Kai gently approached the subject, "Hey man how sure are you that Rebekah is the one for you?"

"Ah 100% my bru, seriously," shot back his instantaneous reply.

"I wonder sometimes how we know who we are going to be in 10, 20 years' time. We change so much, how do you know that your values are aligned to the One to such an extent that they will draw you together as opposed to push you apart over the years?"

"You just know man, you just know."

Kai left it at that and spent days preparing an epic best man's speech. If love was blind, then to what extent is it the role of a true friend to help a buddy see? Even if that vision shatters the beautiful bubble they're enveloped in. Kai decided to take the plank out of his own eye so he could see clearly before trying to help the Morgster take the speck out of his relationship. The wedding was awesome. They were divorced two years later. She left him. Turns out the speck in the pupil was a black hole.

Kai attended some epic churches while in South Africa, two in Cape Town and one in Durban. He met an interesting young guy named Ricky who had shared some similar experiences with Kai. Kai was surprised it came up.

Ricky was 20, had shaved hair. His mannerisms and dress style placed him distinctly in the avant garde Cape Town crew. He'd been into drugs since he was 14 and would "rage like there's no tomorrow!" Until some interesting things happened to him on weed.

"Dude I was stoned, just lying there zoning out at the TV. Suddnely I get this vision man, like a realer than real vision. It's the most beautiful angel I've ever seen. I'm talking like you immediately wanna worship this being type beauty. He was huge and I could just stare at

his feet. He like radiated knowledge and power. But check this out bra, eventually I look up at his face, and its Lucifer himself! That's weed right there bra."

Ricky's story made a big impact on Kai 'cos he knew that Ricky could relate. His mom, Matt, JP, none of them had been opened up to the realm that weed had been a portal to for Kai. And things started to fit into place.

It was around this time that Kai started noticing a different side of weed. It was surprising that he had been blind to it before. It actually felt similar to the vibe that Ray gave off. It empowered with experience and knowledge, but stole character. It was apparent in two people Kai cared about: Matt and JP.

Matt was even more reliant upon the herb than Kai was. It did something different for him. Kai noticed that he was disjointed, lethargic, indecisive, and ignorant during his smoking phases, even when he had sobered up. Kai could tell with one look at him whether he had been smoking that day or not. When Matt had a surf comp coming up, he would stop smoking for a few days beforehand. The change in his persona was incredible. He was solid, quick-witted, and smiled more genuinely. Kai reasoned that it was because it affected Matt differently than it did him. After all, it was what made him aware of the spiritual realm in the first place, and the character growth was indisputable since then! His mom had often told him: "You always think you're the exception, but you're always the rule." Kai thought he was the exception to that expression.

Kai shared this observation of Matt's character change with JP on the roof of a Durban bungalow, with shooting stars blazing along with them as they puffed their Durban Poison. They'd always been able to talk deep. Now JP's responses were smelling fishy. And there was no Omega 3 nutrition in them.

“Ag I think it affects everyone differently hey. You’ve gotta be true to yourself and not care what anyone else thinks. This is your life my bru. Your mom will come to terms with it.”

Kai noticed the progression in JP’s paradigm in the last couple of years. He had always approached relationships from an African holistic point of view, where identity was found in the principle of Ubuntu: “You are who you are through other people.” Kai was noticing a distinct Western Individualism creeping in and embodying itself in these freedom manifestos.

“I had some pretty gnarly experiences with evil while I was away man. What do you think of the devil?”

“Yoh I’m not even sure there *is* a devil. There’s God man, and God is love. And anything that’s not of God is not loving.”

“Ya I’ve heard that before. What have you been thinking about Jesus these days?” JP was always a passionate Christian who deeply understood Christian principles, and Kai always valued his input.

JP thought for a minute, the steady stars creating a backdrop for the outpouring of pounding as weed affected their hearts. “I think Jesus is da man you know. I think he was one of the purest ways that God spoke to humanity. God continues to speak bru. You should look up Sellasie.”

Kai did. He realized that night that him and JP were taking diverging spiritual and life paths. It wasn’t necessarily the religion thing. It was more a dispersal of essences. It was a pity. As they drifted apart, some lines from 2Pac’s song Life Goes On always reminded Kai of that night:

“Get on the roof let's get smoked out and blaze with me

Two in the morning and we still high assed out

Screaming 'thug til I die' before we passed out'

But now that you're gone I'm in the zone

Thinking I don't wanna die all alone.”

Matt had a surf comp coming up in a week. Kai made a deal with him that neither of them would smoke til then. One of Kai's main objectives in life had always been to be a good influence on his impressionable younger brother. The surf comp came and went, and Kai decided to continue his weed fast as an experiment to see what it would do to his consciousness and spirituality. What it would do soon became evident.

God was in the process of setting Kai up on a double date that resulted in a year-long relationship with Serendipity and Synchronicity. The two aren't possessive at all, and even encouraged his two-timing!

Kai's arrival in Singapore ushered in the truly foreign nature of his latest venture. Huge tropical plants intermingled with futuristic cityscape as the silent train slunk hundreds of feet above the ground. 1st and 3rd world collided in a humid fume of flurry on the busy streets. Kai couldn't believe how pedestrians would obey the rules by stopping crossing the street the instant the walking signal started flashing. He knew about the seriousness of violating rules in these countries, and came too close for comfort in Bali.

Kai knew he wasn't going to smoke in Bali 'cos the penalty for taking drugs into the country was *death*. Only a hardcore addict, or a hardcore idiot would do *that*! Turns out he was

inadvertently one of the above. Little did he know, but he had left a thumbnail sized stash of Durban Poison in a side pocket of his backpack. Security at the airport seemed to search every second bag thoroughly. Kai passed through uninspected, ignorant of his near death experience. When he found it later the next day he was presented with a unique opportunity to smoke. Was it God letting him have the opportunity to smoke? He wrestled with it, and limpingly decided to ditch it in honor of God sparing his life. He felt it would be disrespectful to smoke in the face of his rescue. As he buried the little parcel of newspaper, he threw earth on some solid foundations being built.

Bali was out of this world and despite crashing his motorbike in the sea of swarming scooter riders, the place went down in the book as one of his favorites. The surf was incomparable! Balinese cliff fronts towered over turquoise-hued reefs. They called out to something primal within Kai. That same primal surge that Kai felt when he was surfing, and he was now able to saturate himself in it. Although he had the best waves of his life, a cloud of depression hung over him. It was too hot to surf after 9am, and he spent the scorching hours until evening loosened the heat's grip lying water-soaked under a fan in a thatched hut, pondering his unfulfilled feeling.

He met some super interesting people who would share the journey with him temporarily. Two of his Facebook friends happened to be in Bali too and hit him up when they saw his status. It amazed Kai how small the world had become. Other travel partners who he traversed paths with for a spell came and went, never leaving him the same. One presence remained: God. He had invited Kai to flow with Him, and extended His perpetual protection and guidance along with the invitation. The blanket of protection He threw over Kai was sometimes as tangible as it was vision-distorting.

For example, Kai's research had placed India as the spiritual epicenter of the planet, and imbibing the spiritual vibrations became a huge hunger. But for reasons Kai couldn't discern, the opportunity kept expelling him like a case of Delhi Belly. In Singapore he came close to satisfying his craving. He got his Indian visa there and was ready to book his flight. But when he tried to book it, the website wouldn't let him click confirm, despite trying multiple browsers. After numerous attempts, he took this as a sign to think more carefully about it and cancelled the trip. It turned out that the hotel he had listed on his visa application was targeted while he was supposed to be there. Terrorists tragically killed 200 UK and American passport holders. Kai was traveling with an American passport. Death narrowly averted...again.

Each brush with G.Reaper put Kai's life more and more into focus. He didn't know why some people died and some didn't, but he was getting to know the God Who did know. And what Kai knew was that he would rather die living than live in zombie slumber. His headphones could transport him to a world of ignition at the click of a button and the nod of a head.

*"There is no map, there are no signs,
we're on our way, we're crossing lines" - MxPx*

The depression followed Kai like a zombie. It was multiplied by the fact Kai knew that he was supposedly living the dream. He barely left lucid in his waking life. He had stopped having lucid dreams in an attempt to close the portal. He attributed it to a come-down from weed that was lasting months. Maybe he missed solid connection with people too.

Whatever it was, the immense jungles of palm trees in Malaysia were dwarfed by this depression, like Kuala Lumpur is dwarfed by the Petronas Towers. The elephant Kai rode in

Thailand seemed to share in his melancholy, both of them pathetically pursuing the fruit that perpetually dangled 2 feet in front of their faces – a banana for the elephant; bright yellow exuberance for Kai.

New Years in Sydney lit up his night with the explosion of endorphins that came from being popular amongst the youth hostel residents as they flooded the harbor with Opera-toned drunken screams. Melbourne reminded Kai of San Francisco and he missed California. He missed connection. He missed weed like a kid being forced to watch his favorite Disney movie in black and white. In theory he knew that the majestic New Zealand Glaciers that unremittingly encroached upon tropical forests were worthy of awe, but again his emotional response fell short. It was stifled like his sleep was, as his finances forced him to live out of his car for the duration of his 7 day gallivant around the South Island. New Zealand joined Bali on the list of favorites.

Kai conceded to the impulse to drink Cava while in Fiji, and guzzled the stuff to the surprise of the locals. He was trying to drink in satisfaction for his addictive personality, and the supposedly spiritual ritual that accompanied the stuff was a mere byproduct. It didn't occur to Kai that this may have echoed his relationship to weed. He laughed at the tyrant of a tropical cyclone that battered the tent of the bar where he drank cava with the resort staff. No wonder the resort had been empty this week and he had managed to hook a cabin in a decent establishment for dirt cheap! He drank his dirt and smiled at the comical nature of Mother Nature.

He had added California as the final stop on his trip before completing the circle by flying back into gloomy England. It seemed to be a climactic kinda place in his life and he was genuinely excited as he was picked up by his buddy in LA. But Venice Beach's murals looked tacky and the wackiness of its inhabitants pushed his already opened mind into an uncomfortable splits position. He knew America encouraged individuality, and the non-judgmental atmosphere

encouraged eccentricity to develop, but he had to admit that he wasn't loving LA. Nor Vegas. Beer lit up Sin City's darkness. It did the same thing to LA during beer pong at UCLA. Time and time again substance failed to disappoint in its delivery of a neurotransmitter fix. It just couldn't fix his life.

CHAPTER 17: The Big Black Backward Spiral

Back in England, which was always met with renewed appreciation before the novelty washed away with the rain, Kai was about ready to smoke again. He'd gone a year without his herb adding any spice to his experiences, proving to himself and concerned others that he had control over it. Now he wanted to see what it was like again, and whether he could manage to only smoke occasionally.

But he had given his girlfriend an inch with his temporary lapse from smoking, and she intended to take that mile as far as she could ride it. Now that she'd gotten used to Kai not smoking, she told him in no uncertain terms that she was *adamant* he didn't start again! Kai heard JP's words resonate out of his own mouth, "I've gotta be true to myself. This is *my* battle and I can't not face it just 'cos it's inconvenient for you. You have to accept me the way I am, 'cos you knew I was like this when you got into a relationship with me. Weed was never a problem back then." There was the denial and anger, now came the bargaining. Kubler Ross' Stages of Grief? What was he mourning? The answer revealed itself soon enough. "How about I just smoke 2 times a week until we go back to South Africa for me to write my final exams in a month? That's only 8 times!" Reasonable enough, right?

Kai found himself on a plane back to South Africa by himself. For some reason Bella's reasoning didn't resonate with Kai's. Well if Bella wasn't going to let him smoke in her place then he was going to take matters into his own hands. She was joining him in a month anyway, so he was sure that all would be fine. In fact, he told himself, she would respect him more when she recognized his independence and authority. The same independence and authority that she was attracted to all those years ago.

The first time Kai smoked was in that same forested Constantia mountain. He was by himself this time and the high hit him like the homecoming of a long lost loved one. His mind instantly expanded; everything made sense again. Everything! He was happier than he could ever remember being, and wasn't stressed about a single thing in his life. Not Bella, not his exams, not the lack of meaning. He found a renewed admiration and love for Bella that put their relationship into new perspective for him. He found an invigorated passion for his studying material which enabled him to pour over his books enthusiastically for days. He found a meaning in life that was as tangible and natural as the fertile African soil beneath his feet. He found himself again. That day he marveled at the grandeur of Cape Town, the beauty of the South African accent, and the warm familiarity of the culture.

Friday rolled around and Kai was ready for a day of consumption: day smoking, night drinking and eye-candy ingesting at the club. He and JP hit their first chillum at 11:11am. Perched on a mountainside with 8 other Mitchell's Plain locals, the firey weed opened his eyes and he was able to taste each of his companions exuberant and genius personalities for the first time. These same people who Kai would once have feared and thought he had nothing in common with, now seemed to radiate a primordial wisdom that Kai couldn't get enough of. It dawned on him how small minded he had been when he questioned JP's lofty views on that

rooftop back in Durban. What an ignorant and judgmental approach it was to dismiss people based on your own culture's Book and its assertion about Jesus.

The creative juices were flowing in all directions, and two of the guys had fantastic business ideas. Randall wanted to make marketing revenue from the upcoming soccer world cup by installing advertising TV's in places where people were forced to wait in line; Sheldon could get dirt cheap fish from an hour away and sell it for 20x the profit in Town, which would *still* undercut his competitors by 50%. All he needed was a bakkie truck. Kai had the ability to generate Pounds, which generated Rands, which generated opportunities! It was seeming like God was combining ying and yang in a beautiful interconnection between talents. The world felt light and colorful with these coloreds. In these moments Kai didn't realize that despite his colored compadre's complexions, it was *he* who was harboring the darkness.

The day's activities were a river flowing downstream, gathering momentum. There was only one course it could take – the one engrained in the Rock by God. Kai was loving flowing with the perpetual push of direction that seemed to be manifesting itself in the way the day was unfolding. Everything screaming that it was meant to be, interconnected in myriad ways.

That night on the way to a club in Town they pulled over to smoke at Rhodes Memorial, overlooking the landscape that Rhodes himself would have looked upon a hundred years ago. The landscape seemed to morph before Kai's very eyes into its rural ancestor, and Kai momentarily shared in Rhode's vision for the magnificence of the city that was yet to be. The genetics of the natives had not changed in that 100 years despite the exponentially morphing culture. Kai currently had the privilege of sitting atop the lion statues that adorn the memorial with 3 of these natives, who so submitting welcomed him into their land. All 4 of them eagerly anticipated their immersion in the Western party scene that they were headed for!

Sensing the serendipity that seemed to be oozing out of Reality that day, Kai extended an invitation to smoke to some fellow homosapiens who were also loitering at the Memorial.

“Hey!” he yelled across the meters and culture separating them, “you guys want a hit?”

JP spun around on the lion gravely and gave him an urgent look. “Ah we’re gonna miss it if we don’t leave now,” he trumpeted so that the strangers could hear. His voice was strange, it was a tone he had never heard JP use before. The urgency that was latent in his words sent Kai the appropriate message: BAIL! Kai complied, swinging down off the back of the lion statue.

“My bru you’ve gotta be careful!” JP insisted once they had shut the doors of the car. “Those were members of the Numbers gang. Didn’t you see their tattoos? At least two of those bras were 28’s.”

JP’s brother piped up: “Yoh my laanie, those ous would have in the very *least* robbed us *blind* ek se! They’re the ones who have to kill someone as initiation. You remember a while ago all those shootings by those dooses who would drive around with their lights off, like in that American myth? That’s them my bru!”

JP picked up his brother’s thread in a gentler yet firm tone, “This is Africa boet, you’ve gotta keep your oogies peeled.”

In Kai’s stoned state he felt like he would have been able to handle those guys. After all, they shared a common humanity with him. Who knows, maybe he could have even shown them the light! He didn’t wanna minimize what the lads were saying though, so he kept his disputations to himself. Kai had been in danger before and had always managed to keep his heart pulsating. His mind flashed back to 4 years earlier when he had told a black guy in South Carolina that he was more African American than he was. The brother didn’t like that! That

was the third time Kai had a knife pulled on him. He chuckled to himself, 'Don't fear those who can kill only the body, despite their firey eyes and insistence on being the true African! Fear the one who can kill both the body and soul and make you black as can be!' But evil wasn't seeming like it could even be a reality, and the only blackness around was the quarts of Black Label beer they had tucked under the seat in preparation for the party.

A fraction of an hour later and that beer found itself guzzled. Kai only had a couple of sips 'cos there wasn't quite enough to go around...there never was. If he had've had access to it he would have chugged it 'cos he wasn't worried about the greenies. They had adhered to the timeless mantra, 'Bong then beer, you're in the clear; beer then bong you've gone wrong.' Things were going *right* for the boys, and before they knew it, they were right in the heart of the jo!

Kai surveyed the scene. Booming bass blasts were being artistically projected from the luminescent DJ booth. Cape Town's young adults were lapping it up, and letting the strobe light flashes transport them to a place of magic. Friday night was a time for escape! Kai was absorbed with admiration for the DJ's musical intelligence, as he closely watched him navigate his turntables and mixers with style. The DJ was generating and leading the ambience in the room, and Kai found a new appreciation for the art form as an expression of self. In that moment the DJ looked up and spotted Kai, giving him an acknowledging nod. That's when the wool began to unravel.

Kai now noticed that people were, almost imperceptibly, watching Kai out of their peripheral visions. The fascination was mutual. He was particularly struck by a black guy in the front left corner of the dance floor who had epicly timed dance moves.

The guy's friend who was dancing next to him spotted Kai watching and smiled knowingly in his direction. "Watch him," he mouthed, accompanying his lip movement with a hand gesture that would signal the opening of an exhibition.

The black guy's ability to synchronize with the DJ's rhythm was evolutions above the others in the room, and almost supernatural in its rhythmic tract. Kai felt awed, connected, a part of something. He gave the brother an animated hand clap, complete with upturned mouth. Both he and his friend laughed at Kai's humorous mannerisms and lack of fear of looking dorky. The black guy then softened his facial expression further and held Kai's gaze as he walked over to a poster. He pointed at it, and then walked away. 'Woah, he's trying to tell me something inconspicuously.'

Suddenly Kai was immersed in a communication game plucked straight from the Matrix, and his role was to follow the white rabbit trails. He wasn't about to let this entrance to Wonderland pass him by! He went over to the poster. It was a notice of a "Messenger's Meeting" that took place in on Wednesday nights in Long Street. Messengers? Kai's name meant "messenger of God". A coincidence? It could have been if it weren't for a flood of densely charged energy that presently shattered the veil that had covered Kai's eyes. He was resolutely launched into a world that became more than physical.

The first thing he noticed were colors he was never able to see before - pastely, luminescent vibrations of a subtler but more brilliant hue. These colors imbued the room with a surrealism that was beyond the normal wavelength of functioning. It seemed like a set from a play, with actors who had forgotten they were acting. Kai experienced himself and everyone else in the room operating in a realm outside of time. The clock that hung impotently on the wall felt out of place, as if an archaic piece of memorabilia from the 50's. It seemed as flimsy as

cardboard, and as bland too, because the construct it purported to measure was not *real*. A dynamic Present flooded Kai with an overwhelming other-worldliness.

The epic black dancer engaged Kai in a knowing look, smiling broadly now. He appeared to recognize Kai's recognition, and began to point Kai out to a bunch of people scattered throughout the room. Each of them glanced over at Kai and acknowledged him, as if welcoming a new member to their clan. Who were these people? They felt like a secret society in possession of powerful knowledge. Now the Da Vinci Code was stepping up to play. They felt like angels, and the room was filled with them. Kai had just realized *he* was one of them too! As more and more people revealed themselves to be bearers of this level of knowledge, Kai felt a question posed to him – are you willing to take this plunge. Adrenaline and endorphins surging through his open heart, he made huge animated nods with his head in all directions, signaling his enthusiastic openness to what they had to show him.

They began introducing themselves to Kai on a psychic level, and Kai was astonished to know how *many* of them there were. The vast majority of the people there! He could hear their voices – a symphony of chatter. Like the angels talking in the library in the movie *City of Angels*. And Kai was the topic of conversation.

Two of them headed over to Kai and put their hands on his shoulders, “Howzit. There are some people we would like you to meet”. Their strange familiarity lured Kai into increasing levels of a familiar sensation that felt something like remembering. They led Kai to a surfer-looking guy in his early 20's. The guy hugged Kai. His accent and mannerisms were exactly the same as Matt's, and it felt like Kai was being united with Matt's energy in some way.

“Come,” he said, words slurring, arm still slumped over Kai’s shoulder, “I’ll take you to Observatory so you can see what all this is. But I’m warning you, I’m lank wasted...”

“YES bru! I’m coming! Just hold up, I’ve gotta go get my buddies. Cool?”

“Ya cool, just hurry.”

As Kai scanned the downstairs dance floor, he felt an idiosyncratic stylishness return to him. It seemed like a reawakening of his true character, the essence that he innately possessed, and he was a *legend!* The familiarity in which he began to operate was naturally powerful and charmingly assertive. He charged up the stairs to see if the boys were rocking out to the upstairs band. As the upstairs bar and dance floor area opened up to him, so did a floodgate of emotional remembering. He was coming *home*, to *heaven*, and his arrival had just began the welcoming party that had been set up just for him! He felt like 2Pac making an appearance at an LA house party, or arriving in heaven when he died. His excitement couldn’t be contained anymore, and he leaped onto a table with triumphant grandeur and kicked off the wall in a stylish territory marking. He was hilarious! No one around him seemed to act like anything he was doing was unusual, which further verified the authenticity of the experience in Kai’s mind.

Additional verification came in his succession of interactions that pursued.

He was sure he saw Derrick from Sum 41! He asked him.

“Well I’m not Sum 41, *we* are,” he answered, pointing to a group of guys behind him. No ways, was this *real?* Why would the guy say something like that if Kai had it wrong? He spotted JP, a homely face among unknowns, and launched into him into a heartfelt hug. JP beamed in seeming recognition of what Kai was in the process of discovering. “You’re doing great,” he said wisely, “let’s take a walk.” Kai felt *amazing!*

As they passed fellow partiers coming up the stairs, every single entity seemed to recognize Kai. He was famous. He always knew he was on some level. And the recognition was mutual! Every one of these people were revealed to be something like long lost friends who were exactly like Kai in their innate essences, but whose commonality just lay buried beneath society's facades.

External reality again added verification to Kai's internal state as each of them stopped to acknowledge him!

"Woah, this guy is gonna blow our minds," one of the teenagers said to his friend after Kai cracked a joke about time not being real.

"Geez, I don't think I'm ready for this," another heart-buddy said after he embraced Kai. The connection with humanity was unprecedented!

And so was Kai's vibrational level. A pulsation that had started in Kai's heart was now beginning to reach a crescendo in his ears, and it finally burst into wave upon wave of dawning knowledge and wisdom. The first one made his eyes glaze over midway through an interaction with one of his friends on the stairs. "Woah woah woah woah woah," he stammered as his eyes closed. The second wave of insight was double as big, and whopping enough to bring Kai to his knees. They were increasing in complexity, duration, and profundity exponentially, and Kai's frontal cortex was slowly shutting down in order to absorb it all.

Kai was in the midst of a fall into eternity. His mind was overpowered with visions of a cataclysmic fireworks display. His psyche was New Year's Eve in Times Square, and this whole experience was going to culminate in a magnificently colorful display of cosmic proportions that would satisfy Kai and the others on a level their hearts yearned for. And it was all in Kai's

hands! The longer he held out without passing out, the more all-encompassing the display would be, and Kai sensed everyone encouraging him to stick in there.

“Wow, this is gonna be big,” he heard a girl say.

“You’re doing a great job,” JP’s voice repeated as Kai proceeded to succumb to the wave by collapsing into a heap on the floor. “Let’s just make it down the stairs and get outside, there’s something I wanna show you there.”

Kai looked JP in the face and his warm familiarity and wisdom bore the look of God himself. He was faced with a choice: he could either go the quick way and immediately pass over to the Other Side where there would be magnificence and exuberance. Or he could take the walk with JP, which involved walking the earthly path as a choice of delayed gratification that would pay off in the long run. He thought that he chose the second choice, because he pulled himself to his feet with the help of JP and the handrail, and made his way down the stairs. A flash of Bill going the opposite direction haunted him. It was when Kai got outside that he realized he was dead.

CHAPTER 18: Dark Light Shines through a Cracked Mind

Kai didn’t know what had killed him, but he had an instinct that told him he was hit by a car as he was crossing the street outside the club. But he was dead alright; he sensed it. In fact, they were *all* dead! And it was beautiful!

He couldn’t tell how long he had been dead for, maybe he had always been. It wasn’t as black and white as he had once thought. He realized, in fact, that death is not at *all* like he had

thought it was. Death and life appeared to him as cascading swirls of paint that rolled intermingled in front of his eyes. Kai's mind was opened to the cyclical nature of the universe, and he got fleeting glimpses of the evolving Force that held it all together.

He at once understood that we are immortal. But not in an individual kind of way. The individuality that lives on is passed through a form of supremely personalized information in our genetics and our legacy. Beneath our individual entities lies a singular Consciousness that undergirds and gives rise to all diverse manifestations of itself. We are all the same thing fundamentally, and in this way we're alive for all time through members of each consecutive generation. He saw how Life is a journey of increasing complexity, of spirals expanding into spirals. It's a reincarnation of the life force Spark that's more similar to the African paradigm than the European one.

Kai knew he had to strip himself of all cultural identity, and in an act of symbolism he took off all of his clothes and, to the amusement of his on-lookers, started skipping wildly through the park, reveling in his freedom. The lines that defined individual people then began to be stripped too, and people began to blur radically into each other.

JP became Kai's mom, and instantly Kai was 4 years old again learning to tie his shoes. They walked together as Kai talked in a childlike voice and JP told him the story about Alice in Wonderland. Why was JP going along with this? Then JP was Bella, asking Kai if he had smoked. Kai bashfully admitted he had, but then chucked his wallet and cell phone on the floor saying "But I'm willing to give all this other stuff up for you!" His cell phone smashed in unison with his brain.

Kai himself was changing, as he absorbed every possible experience that humans were able to have in this lifetime. He felt himself morphing through various identities. Previous incarnations? Entities from the Collective Unconscious? This series of morphs escalated, singing a chorus of infinite complexity. Finally, it culminated in Kai realizing that he was either Lucifer, or God himself! He saw that they once shared an intimately close bond, and had the same DNA. Satan and Jesus were brothers (Kai only later discovered that this is a Mormon belief.) He kept flashing back and forth between being the two. It seemed like it would be more fun to be Satan.

William James' words once again fell on Kai's intellect like rain:

“The keynote of [the mystical experience] is invariably a reconciliation. It is as if the opposites of the world, whose contradictoriness and conflict make all our difficulties and troubles, were melted into unity. Not only do they, as contrasted species, belong to one and the same genus, but one of the species, the nobler and better one, is itself the genus, and so soaks up and absorbs its opposite into itself. This is a dark saying, I know, when thus expressed in terms of common logic, but I cannot wholly escape from its authority. I feel as if it must mean something, something like what the Hegelian philosophy means, if one could only lay hold of it more clearly. Those who have ears to hear, let them hear; to me the living sense of its reality only comes in the artificial mystic state of mind.”

That's when the messages started becoming more prominent again. They started off on the same caliber as the ones he got in San Francisco, but quickly escalated with spiraling expansion. Kai's mind was more open now than it had been a few years ago apparently, and he was able to access higher dimensions of this knowledge.

He was an oracle.

He was sent from God.

And the awed expression and questions his friends were asking him seemed to verify this assumption. Teachings and understandings from the powers and principalities of the earthly realm started becoming clear to him, and he saw the role of the law and justice systems in human society. Then alien revelations started coming to him in flashes of numbers that seemed to assemble one digit at a time. Kai felt like he was traveling at lightning speed through evolutionary lifetimes.

The boys managed to convince Kai that it was time to go home. While Kai bounced in the backseat, abuzz with pulsating energy, a text message came through. "Let's meet up some time," it read. Kai thought it was from a girl, which excited him. He was really enjoying the South African meisies! He didn't reply 'cos he wanted to be loyal to Bella by telling her about it first. He had every intention of replying though, 'cos he had no idea who the text could be from. He hadn't given his number to any girls. And this could very well be another white rabbit synchronistic set up that the Universe was delivering to him, leading him to his soul mate. His newfound openness was clear that he needed to follow his destiny wherever it led him. So he sent Bella a text telling her that he was going to pursue whatever signs God told him to follow, even if God introduced him to other girls. "Not to worry though," he told her reassuringly, "if we're meant to be, which I really think we are, then God will keep sending me signs that you're the One." He wouldn't hook up with anyone while he was with Bella, but he had an open mind.

In the backseat, JP became a manifestation of Bella, and Kai was overjoyed to sense her energy next to him. He held her hand firmly, squeezing his fingers between JP's clinched ones. Again, JP went with it and obliged by squeezing back hard and maintaining the hold.

Kai had a powerful sense that they were all going to crash and felt like there was nothing they could do to avoid it, so they might as well enjoy the ride. He playfully stuck his feet up into the driver's side of the car. Dropped his flip flop, he stuck his big toe in the driver's ear. He was hilarious as ever! The boys were just going with it, and responsibly interjecting only when everyone's safety was at stake. Presently, Kai thought that the driver was his dead dad, and suddenly Kai felt like his destiny was to fight him. He persistently taunted Jezray, who he had just met that day, trying to press his buttons by highlighting that he was black and a Muslim. Jezray brushed it off repeatedly in noble meekness.

"We're angels boet, we don't fight," he chuckled as he navigated the M5 back to the Southern Suburbs. The extent to which Kai was willing to go seemed unrelenting. It peaked just before 5am.

As the gang sat watching the sun rise over Table Mountain, Kai got hungry. Lying on the floor of the car was an empty box of crackers with a picture of an old man on it. The cartoon image came alive and protruded its animated hand out of the box and *slapped* Kai!

Who did he think he was?!

He didn't have time to follow the thought.

Memories that Kai had never had access to flooded his consciousness. Trivial things:

brown and yellow striped shirts

I'd so appreciate comments! telljoshstuff@gmail.com

a reflective glass fishtank

his Papa.

Everything went quiet – internal and external.

That's when it made sense to him.

Or not sense so much, but firm

direction from a higher place.

Overpoweringly, Kai knew now that his destiny, and what would begin the path of setting things right in the world, was to chop his grandfather up and then eat his flesh. Yes, *eat* his flesh!

“Off with his head!” screeched JP in a woman's voice.

He looked back at JP. He hadn't moved. Had he really heard that?

The gruesomeness of the message registered in the logical centers of his brain, but the insistence persisted til he found his mind rationalizing. This was his chance to prove how far he was willing to go to advance in the spiritual realm. He had to trust these forces, they had shown him so much and now they were offering to take him in powerful directions, control him.

In his mind's eye he saw himself knocking on his grandfather's door, axe in hand. Unsuspecting slaughter... Where could he buy an axe now? Were any hardware stores open? How could he...

Another voice tried to break through: "You could sacrifice yourself rather. Why do you think that..."

No, since the generational cycle, the alcoholism, the addiction, had all started with his grandfather, it had to end with him too.

Then he remembered that Papa's axe was still in the trunk from that camping trip they made last year. He'd shoved it to the back to make room for new things in the trunk. It was time to bring those old skeletons out of their darkened hiding places. And to create new ones. He didn't say anything to the guys. What was he going to say? "Off with his head?" He let out a grim chuckle to himself. Booming thumps enveloped his chest as he dropped them off and hid the sick excitement behind smiles and a rigid body posture.

He didn't experience the drive. He had zoned out whilst driving in the past, but only for a minute max. Now he came to himself briefly as he negotiated the parallel parking outside his Grandfather's duplex. Rain gently pitter patted on his crusted-up windscreen, and then broke through its timidity to release a dark veil of water on the dawn. He found himself immersed in it, and reveling in the increased madness it served to create.

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.

CHAPTER 19: Reinventing the Wheel

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 his life organ. 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.

Ping...pong. The muffled doorbell was unobtrusive in the sleeping night. Look, he'd pressed it, he'd come this far. Surely God knew that he did intend to follow through and that was enough? He could leave now if...

Dim light burst through the door cracks, and Kai heard the shuffle of footsteps down the wooden stairs. Papa had woken up! Ok this was his last chance to bolt, this was ridiculous. But yet...how would he ever know what God had intended. "The world has yet to see what God can do with a man fully consecrated to Him." No, fortune favors the bold. Kai stepped back and swung the axe above his shoulder, reveling under its weight.

Pfff. The seal of the door was broken as it began to swing inwards. Kai's fingers that were locked into the orange plastic squeezed so hard that the blood ran out of them. Did he want to see his Papa's face first? He chose to.

And that's when the blackness hit him.

As he fell limp to the floor, his body a gelatinous mound of flesh, the image that had greeted him burned onto the screen of his mind. He had seen *himself* looking back at him from

inside the house! His very own irises locked onto each other, creating a feedback loop with his soul. How could this be...

He heard the voice of his mom's friend telling him how, when he had his near-death experience, he saw every kind of demon imaginable, and they all had his own face!

The axe tumbled out of his hand and bounced off the pavement back onto his open palm. It sliced through his flesh like a spoon through jelly. He felt nothing but bewilderment, acquiescence; he saw nothing but enveloping blackness.

The next sensation Kai experienced was the wet concrete on the palms of his hands. The rain fell like heavy nails against a metal chalkboard.

"Son." Kai kept his eyes closed. The voice was familiar but not his own. He wasn't even sure in this moment who *he* was. "Son it's me."

Dad!!

"Malakai!"

Kai's eyes shot open to see his dad's handle-bar mustache upturned into a smile. His weathered skin was inches away from his own face, his heated breath instantly animated Kai's limp body. But his eyes! It was still Kai's *own* eyes looking back at him. He saw the mirror-image specks of yellow gleam off their counter-part. Flashes of twisting rope from the brown ceiling shot into his consciousness; his dad kissing him on the beach; the two of them in the swimming pool.

"Son I want you to see. Come with me."

Blackness once again embraced Kai.

When the world faded back in, he was standing at the entrance to a theme park. It hung with the profundity of an archaic archetype. Was this a dream? He felt his own hands, pinched himself. There was nothing to differentiate between this and reality. He went to look at his watch, but got distracted by the music. It was familiar. It's boppings seemed to be animating a wooden Ferris wheel at the epicentre of the park.

Suddenly, he spotted his dad's blue jeans swiftly making their way through deserted pathways to the entrance of the Ferris wheel. Dad! Kai's own jeans chased in his footsteps. He was now close enough to see the back of his old man's leather brown ears, and he was closing the distance. He had tinges of homesickness as he watched his father's familiarly-structured arm reaching to steady himself while mounting a passenger car of the Ferris wheel.

The wheel creaked in its perpetual spin, pushing his father away from him. But not far. Kai clambered into the clanking chair. It felt familiar. Almost like a portion of his life was spent riding that wheel. Other characters began to make their presence know; they seemed familiar too. He felt tinges of recognition as his eyes fell on a decrepit old man in the passenger car ahead of his dad, a dehydrated prune staring blankly ahead. Behind Kai, two young children waggled their way into the car, vision locked on him, a nervous apprehension lurking behind their pure white eyes. Kai assumed that their interest in him was because he was one step ahead of them on the ride and they were about to follow in his tracks.

All were now locked in their designated cycle, and the ground began shrinking away from Kai. Only now did it occur to him that it would have been a better move to wait for his dad at the bottom of the wheel and not climb on board; if his dad climbed off after the first rotation there was still a chance he would miss him.

“Daaaaad!!” Kai thundered. To his delighted surprise, the man twisted his head around. *Yes!* Gradually his father’s face revealed itself like the ancient moon waxing, and his handle-bar moustache raised itself into that closed-mouth smile he had witnessed moments before on the cold ground. Warmth began to surge Kai’s heart.

“Malakai,” the man said in his father’s raspy voice, “you should have waited at the bottom of the wheel; there was no need to climb on board with me.”

“But Dad, I’ve been trying to catch up to you for...” Kai let his words fade away as the lyrics to the music that had been bopping in the background finally registered to Kai: it was The Lion King’s “The Circle of Life.” He finally understood what the wheel was, and what he had been doing.

In triumph he dismounted the archaic circle at the next revolution. His feet connected with the earth’s firmness; he felt alive. The children in the car behind him followed his lead and dismounted the ride with relieved jubilation, ditching the stagnation behind them in the dismal dust. Kai’s father stayed where he was. He was trapped in his circular course, perpetually watching the earth and his family shrink away from him. But his closed-mouth smile had now burst forth into white-teeth that radiated starry glory.

Kai woke up on the beach, the wind tickling his hair. White noise water rushed onto the shore and was in no hurry to get back. How did he get here? Another blackout? He couldn’t remember what happened after the... wait. He remembered it all. Dad! He shot up, sand falling from the side of his face. The wind picked up. The cloud on the horizon told Kai that the prevailing South-Easter wind had shifting – it could now blow where it pleased. He breathed deep.

CHAPTER 20: New Construction Requires Demolition

“Dude...what the hell was *that*?!” he asked JP, hoping he hadn't sabotaged their friendship with his ridiculous antics, including some gay hand holding. They had gone for a drive to check the surf.

JP was calm and just smiled amusedly. He gently explained to him that there were lessons to be learned. “One main lesson,” he said, “was that you should be a mirror instead of a prescription.”

He couldn't believe how wise his friend was, and how appropriate his enigmatic responses were. Why hadn't he noticed this before? Kai now realized that JP had pretty much always just gone with Kai's vibe. Kai used to assume that it was because they were the same kind of soul deep down, but now he saw that it was just JP's adaptable nature that allowed their interaction to feel so organic.

“Bru each person that your interact with is a mirror that we see ourselves in, and God through. *We* have God in us, *they* have God in them, but we both just have only partial visions. It's by letting the Spirit lead that the bridge between those partial views and Gods infinite view is crossed.

“Time is a big issue,” he continued. “It's almost more accurate to say that time goes *backwards*. It's a process of unburdening our shoulders with these weights we've put on ourselves. We have the choice to die deaths to these individual burdens each day, just like Paul said. Only then can we be reborn in a more purified, older, more holistic way...” he paused and

looked out the car window as the sun's golden beams gleamed from behind ancient mountains. "It's like God confronts us with a choice of instant gratification of the senses, or death to that desire. Death is always something we don't want at the time, but we know it will take us somewhere better. God works in our life to the extent that we choose death to everything that's not him. You chose it last night.

'Jesus, although being in very nature God...' (like you realized *you* are tonight through your like dualistic struggle between good and evil) '...did not consider equality with God something to be grasped at, but humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death'.

"You were willing to die last night, to the extent that you actually believed you had already accomplished it. All that psychological stuff that goes back to your childhood is just kak that your mind needs to work through."

How did JP seem to know exactly what Kai had been through? Kai attributed it to the fact that he was probably narrating the majority of his internal experiences throughout the episode, just like he had with Matt the first time.

JP continued as Kai listened with awed appreciation, "Life's a riddle, a contradiction, a dualism, a holism, a paradox. Every word that you can think of, life's the opposite too." Kai recognized the echo of Buddhism in that statement. He started to see that he had been reductionist in his thinking. The western mindset is a facet of wisdom; so is the African mindset. But although each of these two are varying reflections of the same eternal truth, they eliminate the other, along with an infinite amount of possibilities, if you solely focus on either. Labels are really dodgy 'cos they cause us to focus on differences and only see things through those

binoculars. Binoculars are good for seeing things up close, but eliminate the big picture with their lack of peripheral vision.

Kai didn't agree with all that JP was explaining to him. But the newfound wisdom that he could hear humbled him.

JP continued, "We've all been put here to be a vehicle to allow God's essence to come out. It's kinda like mediumship of the spirit. Like here in Africa man, it's all about community. In community is where religion originated. It's a living church; It's the Word. Western society started in Europe, and now Europe's pioneering the religious decline. Too much logic and left brain analysis, and so-called Enlightenment ek se. It works sweet with technology, but it microwaves meaning til it's a ball of gloop. Isolates people from each other, you know, and so annihilates Ubuntu.

"We've gotta be open to people my bru. It's about *community*, like I said. Even Jesus right, Jesus travelled from place to place, but He mostly healed people when they came to *Him*."

Kai felt the need to be healed. He was either schizophrenic, a prophet, or both. Black...white...red...Fire had sparked the whole ignition, and now fire was burning up his life.

...

The heat started consuming his world in a carnivorous fire. It had already devoured his sanity. Now it took his girlfriend. It was 7:14am one morning when Bella woke Kai to reveal her infidelity.

She had kissed a friend's brother...twice, she told him. An emotional affair had been going on for weeks. She gaped into his sleepy eyes looking for the reaction. The expected

jealousy never came. What engulfed Kai instead was a shakiness that stemmed from the core of his body. He shook at the gravity of her decision, and at the realization of the magnitude *his* decision that now lay before them.

Although there had been cracks in the foundation of their relationship from the first day she playfully stood on Kai's feet in the bar, Kai never thought the building would come crashing down like this. It was a heavy move to make, at a heavy time. It was almost like she subconsciously wanted this push, and had gathered the heaviest straw she could find in order to throw it on the back of their humped beast of a relationship. Kai's manic texts from South Africa must have been the weighty bails that her heavy straw fell upon the top of. The camel's back broke, taking down Kai's support structure. Kai could rebuild from scratch, or he could leave.

Accompanying the weight of the situation though was a now familiar calm assurance that instilled a solid peace to his instantly turbulent world. It came from somewhere deep down inside of him. It was the same illogical tranquility that transcended over him as he was watching Rudi's lifeless body being dragged from the ocean. It bore with it a profundity that Kai had come to realize was from God Himself. He wasn't nearly as surprised by the paradoxical calmness now as he was when he was just a surfer party animal. Before he even prayed to ask God what he should do, he knew in the depths of his being what the answer would be.

PART 3: DIFFERENTIATED UNITY

CHAPTER 21: The Necessity of Surgery

A week later Kai had severed his previous life in Cornwall. Renting a room in a stone monastery called the Rambler's Rest, Kai wrestled with the split in the road that he had inadvertently meandered his way into. He had no money, no girlfriend, no home, no spiritual integrity. He was on the borderline of psychosis. Jonah was at his lowest – in the belly of the fish, and already cursing the green plant that failed to save him from the heat of the flames when he sparked it.

But something had changed within him, something to do with that vision of his dad, and the decision he made to dismount the wheel. He couldn't quite put his finger on what, but somewhere, from the midst of the fire, a still, small voice called out to him - "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."

Kai's path lay not in the windy currents of synchronicity. It didn't lie in the earthquake of traveling. And it definitely did not lie in the passion of fire. It was simpler than all that, and Kai had missed it all along. He had been trying hard to attain spiritual maturity, when it was a question of submission of his will, rather than training of his brain, that stood in his way.

On a more solid level than everyday decision, he felt a call to obedience. Not glorious splendor. Like JP had said, even Jesus did not consider equality with God something to be grasped. His paradigm shifted with a humble thud as an elegant Truth dawned on him with the persistence and initial subtlety of a sunrise. A truth that despite its lack of bells and whistles, resonated echoingly with a profound wisdom that lay at the heart of Reality: Jesus's path led to Life. Kai now had the same choice that Jesus had given the rich young man – a choice of

loyalty, of foundation. Kai had tried to love two girls at once in the past. He had tried to be loyal to two countries. He had tried to have his magic cake and eat it. Now it was turning out that you can't have two masters – if you don't love the One who loves back, you'll split your soul in two.

“Jesus please help me to be more like you,” he prayed.

Once he understood it, the choice was easy. In the same way as his soul knew that he needed to break up with Bella before he had even prayed to ask God for an answer, Kai knew that the decision had been made already on an other-than-conscious level. If your hand causes you to slap yourself, cut it off.

He cut off weed... forever. There was a solidness based in eternity in this final decision.

He didn't want to dull the pain of this breakup by using the numbing effect of alcohol and the distraction and ego gratification of chasing after girl's affection. He vowed to always maintain control while drinking, keeping his intoxication to the legal driving limit. It was too slippery of a slope for his alter egos to slide in on.

And girls? There were still a lot of them in Cali, and they still loved his accent. But he made a covenant with his eyes not to lust. It was an exercise in breaking a habit that he was all too familiar with because of his experience in neuroplasticity. It was relatively easy, and it restored a latent energy within him that he never would have guessed had been dissipated so dramatically.

This allowed him to further shift his pursuit. He moved away from a focus on knowledge, power, and experience. His emphasis now was on character – his own, and that of his future wife, wherever she may be. Only then can God deliver someone who is on the same

track as him. All this was a learning opportunity and he knew he'd keep being enrolled in the same class till he passed.

The pain of the breakup was a tangible void, and yet at the same time a jubilant opening. The void had the character of immediacy and physicality; the joy had the same character of the peace that Kai had become accustomed to feeling in tragedy – it was subtler, more deep down, more eternal.

He knew he had his work cut out for him. He had deep psychological pain to heal, and gaping crevices within himself to mend with Divine concrete. And though there was bound to be ample sweat involved in the process, he knew he was connected with deep fountains of eternal nourishment that would keep him more than hydrated!

Kai rode the emotional rollercoaster with the Wind at his back. From the peaks of Cornish hills Kai would compose songs spiritual songs that he would scream out into the oncoming gale-force gusts - a melody between him, his soul, and God. From the clouded valleys of gloom he would compose poems of mourning for the pain of a dear friend – a pain that *he* was in the process of causing.

The first of July and it starts with a sigh

As I breathe out my old life and cry

An old stone cold place replaced the hut's sunny sky

As mutual horizons have been bid goodbye

With never dry eyes I cry out to the Wind, "WHY?!"

'cos it's an illusion that the sky's blue, it's black!

*Just like the space that's created as a world's color dies,
and galaxies of confusion I try to smile through come back*

Is it the callousness I feel towards the softest of friend

Bubbles don't stand much chance when colliding with rock

Is it the staggeringness of the fact that it's really the end

or the dizziness caused by strong aftershocks?

The majority of the pain was caused by his knowledge that his decision was breaking the heart of a person he cared about deeply. He envisioned a child reaching for a parent through a closing door as they were leaving forever. Bella's persistence in trying to get Kai back forced him into having to repeatedly slam the child's hand in the door, causing more pain with each closure. The child's tears were acid tearing into his heart. Still, he knew that doors have to be closed for others to be able to be opened. And since he knew her actions had meant that he wasn't satisfying her either, he held firm to the belief that he was doing this in both of their best interests. He believed that a person should never settle when it comes to choosing someone to marry. He was going to find the type of person God wanted him to be with even if it meant initial loneliness.

He forgave Bella for her unfaithfulness, and he asked her forgiveness for his part in it. But forgiveness doesn't mean you need to devote your life to eradicating a fault. The faultline was too entrenched in the cracks that they had allowed to wrench apart their relationship like the perennial force of tectonic plates. They were two continents headed in diverging directions, and there comes a point in doing to do the splits in gymnastics where you either commit to years of

suppleness training, or commit to an amputation, or change your sport. Surfing played its part in calling Kai home. California's persistent beckon to the depths of Kai's heart was finally heeded. He always knew he wanted to live there. Bella had always hated it, probably because she knew how much Kai liked it. Now he could allow God to set his course.

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On landing in the palm treed oasis, he palpably felt his roots sinking down into an endless supply of water. Water that was increasingly washing away all the dirt of a life and philosophy built in the earth. This type of nourishment was in the earth, but not of the earth.

Surfing was a beautifully therapeutic catharsis that aided in his healing. He knew he had to endure the depressing come down off weed again, and the greyness it would inevitably generated. He knew that the pain of the breakup would add salt to that wound, but also that salt had healing properties. Surgery is never fun, but more fun than not having it.

Kai joined a small community church, a family of growers. He completed his healing amongst the warm fireplace of the church, where his inner coals were ignited by being surrounded by lit ones. In small groups he formed friendships on a level that he hadn't enjoyed since his teenage years. But he had transcended the teenage phase, and the isolation of a dualistic split.

CHAPTER 22: An Ironic Full Circle – the Extraordinary is Found in the Ordinary

What does a butterfly think of the caterpillar life once he's soaring in color? Does he look down on them?

Kai didn't feel other-worldly and above everyone else. Differentiated unity is not enlightenment. Kai still knew he was a worm, just an increasingly colorful one who was slowly squishing his fear of heights. It was an irrational fear anyway – he was created to fly. A larger portion of his consciousness was allocated to the Kingdom of God.

Now the Kingdom of God is not merely another land we go to when we die. It is the state that arises when God is your *King*. It is the physical, mental, psychological, and spiritual renewal that occurs when you pray “Your will be done,” and mean it.

Like Switchfoot says, “I'm an already but not yet resurrected fallen man.” Yip, exactly that.

Jesus told the teacher of the law that his understanding showed that he was not far from the Kingdom of God. His *understanding*. See, God meets us where we are in the midst of our current understanding of this life, but He loves us too much to leave us there. He transforms the lenses we view life through, because the eye is the lamp of the body. Everything is then viewed in its right color, instead of being tainted by the false hues of the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. When creation is allowed to radiate its natural color, magic *is* restored to the world! We reawake to an enchanted Eden!

Kai was done hiding behind the fig leaves of mind games and indecisiveness. His Eve was presented to him when he had done the interior renovation necessary to make room for her safely. If she had've come any sooner, he would have choked the life out of her with the dust of his old way of thinking.

"Kai, this is Anna," their mutual friend said as soon as Kai walked into the bar. She was sitting at the first table near the entrance. Not hard to find.

"I think we've met before," Anna said, glowing with a faint smile of enchantment.

"I don't... think so...but you *do* seem familiar. Well it's nice to meet you, again," Kai said. As they shook hands flirtatiously, it was like Kai was being re-introduced to himself. The room around them was abuzz with activity, but Kai and Anna were enclosed in an insulated cocoon. A transformation was happening, and they both knew it.

"This is the first time I've been out since my ex died in a shark attack a year ago," Anna confessed. Kai's jaw dropped open and his eye's drooped with genuine sympathy. The previous shark attack in his life had ignited a paradigm-shift; was there something transformational about the pain of the seemingly-evil?

"It's ok," she continued, recognizing his empathetic concern, "it *was* so so hard, but it also changed me for the better. I got to know God through it all. Really he was the only thing that pulled me through. What about you, do you believe in God?"

Kai's heart fluttered. "More than I believe in the earth," he said.

Luke had once told Kai that people were like trains on tracks. Either those tracks converged, or they diverged. He had said that the real secret to success in a relationship is not to focus solely on each other, but rather on a mutual destination. When two tracks are heading towards the same destination, they have no choice but to get closer and closer, and also move forward in their mutual quest. Progress, growth. Kai abruptly found himself on a head-over-heels collision course.

He asked her to be exclusive the very next day. He knew all too well the danger of playing games, and was no longer afraid to commit to one course of action at the expense of others. We were designed for covenant. Life is ironic, and one of its ironies is that it is the narrow yellow brick road that leads to freedom.

Brick by brick, his restless spirit came to see the beauty and freedom in a solid foundation. He bought a 2 bedroom house in Santa Barbara, where he could finally sprawl his soul all over the walls. He finished his psychology degree, plowing through his other side's insistence that he pursue 16 other career paths.

His degree quickly landed him a position counseling kids on the brink of schizophrenia. "It takes one to know one," he would say. When the children's raw souls would inevitably open up to him and tell him about the voices, or the spirits, he would tell them fairy tales about the knights of old who had to battle dragons. He'd hand them a sword and tell them that the King's name has mighty authority in it. He'll ensure them that they *will* slay these monsters, even if it takes a journey, a lot of hard work, and some scrapes. They are the good guys, and good ultimately wins.

And then he warns them that dragons, like all lizards, are regenerative creatures. The only way to make sure they don't grow back is to strengthen your light. Dragons and sharks hate the light.

"Vampires do too," they would usually say.

"Keep growing and keep warm in a community of growers," he'd say. "It's like the queen of hearts said in Alice and Wonderland: 'Here, you see, it takes all the running you can

do, to keep in the same place. If you want to get somewhere else, you must run at least twice as fast as that!"

They would smile. They liked Alice in Wonderland.

"But she's a bad guy," they would protest.

"The most powerful bad guys use 95% truth and 5% fiction. 'Fact and fiction work as a team.'" He didn't expect them to understand these things completely. After all, he didn't. Nor did he expect them to know that he was quoting Jack Johnson. He didn't quite know what Jack meant either. Or whether it meant jack. Ultimately, words are just a fragment of soul. But sometimes they hide extraordinary color behind their ordinary black and whiteness.

Kai is now living a life that, at a glance, seems ordinary. But here's the thing: the ordinary is *never* ordinary, if ever one pauses long enough to observe it. Rainbows and butterflies have their origins in storms and worms respectively.

Dust we are, and to (fairy) dust we shall return. Because birth always happens on either end of our candlestick of life. But sometimes, especially within certain generations of humanity, the comfort of the womb doesn't prevent one from going through the pain of labor.

By the way, when is *your* birthday?

"A very merry unbirthday to you, to *us*," the Mad Hatter perpetually sings from within his cocoon, outside of time.

END