



AWAKE (ARE WE)?

~ PART ONE ~
JOURNEY TO THE
WATERFALL KINGDOM

Story by: **Marty Connor**

Written by: **Marty Connor & Rosie J May**

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Kingdom*

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Eloquent Books
New York, New York

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Eloquent Books

An imprint of AEG Publishing Group

845 Third Avenue, 6th Floor — #6016

New York, NY 10022

www.eloquentbooks.com

ISBN: 978-1-61204-224-4

SKU: 1-60693-126-1

Printed in the United States of America

*I would like to dedicate this first story to my
grandparents*

Joan Coble

Reginald Coble

Eva O'Connor

Fredrick O'Connor

*They are missed but may their names live on
through the Awake Series.*

Acknowledgements

I would like to say a big thank you to King Bad Dog whose input has help bring the adventure of the Awake series alive.

I would also like to thank Steven Dedman with his much needed support over the last few years and a big thank you to Georgina from the New York agency who has helped us to get this far.

Thank you also to the friends and family who have believed in me and my ideas.

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1

The Beginning

The daily mayhem of hospital clinics and visiting hours had died down to the more manageable nightshift. Now the only obvious activity was the beep of life support systems and the moans, screams and profound language of expectant mothers attempting to produce the latest offspring into the world. For one young mother however, the ordeal was all but over.

“It’s a boy!” the midwife announced, as she gently wrapped the tiny, crying child inside a clean sheet and rested him on his mother’s chest for the very first time. Emma looked down at her son. Tears were pricking the back of her eyes as she smiled lovingly at him. She could hardly believe that this was her creation, the being that drained her of all her energies but one. She would love him forever she thought to herself as she closed her eyes. It had been a difficult birth and now that the delivery was over, she would allow herself some rest and give in to the exhaustion.

The miracle of this life from the unseeing eye had been no different than hundreds of thousand of other births throughout the world that day but for those that had a sixth sense, it was as unique as the finger print on the child’s hand. Unbeknown to him, he had been chosen. Quite what path he was destined to take had not yet been defined but as the event of his life unfolded it would become apparent that it would lead to a strange and incredible adventure.

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A few days had passed before Emma was strong enough for visitors and up until that point she really hadn't noticed her isolation. It wasn't until she recognized a friendly voice did it occur to her just how lonely she had been.

"Hello Emma", came the greeting.

"Hello Tom. Please come in," she replied trying not to sound too eager for the company.

Tom placed the large bouquet of flowers on the table beside her bed and wandered over to the cot.

"So this is little William, hey? What a Cutie." he smiled, before picking up a chair and placing it quietly next to Emma's bed.

Emma raised a half hearted smile at her friend and thanked him for visiting her. Considering this was supposed to be the happiest time of her life, her eyes were filled with a loss of sadness.

"I know it's hard for you Em," said Tom as he gently rested his hand over hers, "You know he would have been there if he could."

At the mention of the young baby's father, a single tear rolled silently down Emma's face. Just the mention of his existence caused her heart to ache and a reminder of her empty world without him.

"Tom! How long have we been friends?" asked Emma

"About seven years or so I would say" replied Tom, "Why do you ask?"

"Because I need to tell you something I have kept to myself for more years than I care to remember," she answered.

"Now you're scaring me a little Em? What can be so bad it has taken this long to tell me?" Tom asked confused by her strange attitude.

"My family" she began to continue,

"Sssh!" he said in an effort to calm her down, "we don't need to talk about that now. This is supposed to be a time for happiness."

"But I need to tell someone what really happened" she urged "Please Tom," she pleaded, "I must tell you."

Tom was even more confused by Emma's determination to bring up the past and not wanting to upset her further offered an opening for her to begin with the story.

"Your parents died in their holiday home, of monoxide poisoning, didn't they?" he asked, "and then a few weeks later your sister, her husband and your nieces were all killed in a car crash!"

"True. All of it", Emma agreed.

“And your husband, the father of your child, disappeared whilst on a business trip, leaving you with no family. A sad story I have to admit but hardly a secret. You don’t have to worry about the past. I am here now Em and promise to help you all I can.”

“You are a good friend Tom” Emma smiled for the first time since Tom had entered the room “and I do appreciate your friendship but...”

“But you are telling me now, that is not what happened to your family?” Tom asked feeling an uneasy shiver run through his body.

The agony of the loss was still very much in her mind and a stabbing pain pulled at her heart reminding her how so alone she felt.

“I did not say before but there was an eye witness to my parent’s death. It was never added to the statement because the police dismissed it as an imaginative whim. I have to admit that I didn’t even consider it to be true at the time but for the last few weeks I keep getting this odd feeling that perhaps the witnesses were not crazy and maybe they did see something.”

Tom just stared intensely into Emma’s face. There was nothing he could say. Whatever it was she believed in, frightened her, as he read the fear flickering through her piecing, blue, eyes. All he felt he could do was to encourage her to talk and hope this would make her see she was merely suffering from ‘the baby blues’.

“So what did they see?” he asked her.

“The first was a next door neighbour of my parents.” She slowly continued as she tried to hold back the tears of recollection of that awful event, “She was coming back from the local shops around about one o’clock in the afternoon. She said she remembered it well because the one o’clock news was drifting out from a radio in one of the gardens as the gardener cut the grass. It was a beautiful summer’s day and not a cloud scarred the bright, blue skyline. As she passed my parents home, she noticed that the entire house was marred in darkness, as if sitting in a mountain’s shade. No sunshine hit their roof or flooded their garden, nothing but blackness. She thought it odd for a moment but then didn’t give it a second thought. Not even when she suddenly watched the darkness lift and the sun once more add warmth to the ground. Later on that day she popped next door to ask my parents to dinner. The door to their home was open as always and she walked in announcing her arrival but to her dismay my parents were no where to be found. For two hours she searched the house. Nothing was moved and there was no sign of a struggle. All that was found was a pile of dust. Two piles actually, one on the chair

and one in the middle of the floor. The mystery of their disappearance was never solved, and if you were to look up their names in the police records you would see they are both, 'missing, presumed dead'.

Tom didn't know what to say and before he could think up an adequate response Emma wiped the tear that had somehow managed to escape from her eye and carried on with her story.

"The same thing happened to my sister and her family. A farmer nearby noticed this strange darkness over their car as it drove passed him, and then it lost control and drove off the road. He rushed over to see if he could assist in anyway and when he opened the car doors found no one inside only four piles of dust on the seats."

"But didn't the police do something?" asked Tom, angry that so little was done to resolve the two crimes.

"No. Not really. What could they do? Again they dismissed the story as unreliable. The farmer was renowned for having a drinking problem and they said he was probably under the influence at the time. This might have been so I never found out but how was it that two entirely different people could offer the same story?"

"Why did you never tell me this before?" asked Tom as he sat on the bed, put his arm around her shoulder and tried to console her, "I mean, yeah, it sounds a little crazy but maybe there is some kind of answer to all of this. Maybe they are not dead. No. That's a stupid idea because if they were alive they would have contacted you." he added trying to make some sense of Emma's bizarre story.

"Then you do believe me?" she asked.

"How could I not sweet Emma," he smiled "You are the most honest and sweet person I have ever met in my life? What reason would you have to lie to me now?"

"But there is more" Emma added, as if she felt he must know everything for his own safety. "Shortly after that, the morning my husband disappeared, he said his goodbyes as usual to me and our unborn child. Only the emotion of his farewell was as though it was the last time he would ever see us. I just thought he was being over dramatic as he was always so romantic. I accepted it as normal affection and thought nothing of it but that night, when he failed to return it made me re-live the goodbye again and again in my head until I could re-enact the occasion with my eyes closed. The look in his eyes that day was one of love but now I believe one also of sadness and a sense of loss. A sign I am certain now, that he knew something was

going to happen to him, an awful event that would pull him out of my very existence.”

“So why didn’t you stop him from leaving?” asked Tom who was now engrossed in his friends story.

“I couldn’t. There was something about the way he came into my life that never made me question his actions. I know its a cliché to say ‘and there he was right in front of me, the man of my dreams’. Well, he literally was the man of my dreams or that was how it always felt to me.”

“So why tell me all this now?” asked Tom, “Why not before William was born.”

”I don’t know” cried Emma, “I just feel that now I have William, I have to concentrate all of my energies in keeping him safe and I cannot do it alone. I need your strength to protect him. I have this awful feeling that the darkness that took my family is coming for him and there is nothing I can do to stop it.”

Tom was convinced now that the birth had put some strain on Emma’s mental abilities but rather than question her further he offered assurance of his loyalty.

“Don’t worry Em, I’ll protect you both.” he told her confidently.

Consumed by the confession of the deep and sad truths of her life with her only friend in the world, it was no wonder that Tom and Emma failed to notice or sense a strange presence lingering discreetly near William’s cot.

The spectre, a mere shadow in the dark was a Hallucium. Guardian or rogue it’s childlike form was less than a metre high and could melt into the air around it. If by some rare chance they were ever caught in the correct light they might just show some shape or form but most of their time they would drift in and out of reality. Existing in a limbo, where they could evaporate into the shadows and exist only as a dream. On occasion though, ameliorated perception would enable certain people to catch sight of these hallucinations. Various studies from the most prominent academics were still unable to verify their existence and rather than admit to failure would denounce the reality of such creations. In truth, the assumption was correct. For the Hallucium was not a creature of reality but from the depths of the imagination. It was never understood as to whether their intentions were ever really honourable and as any written description was nearly always ‘Pixie like’ or ‘small like a Gremlin’ it wasn’t difficult to assume that their presence could only mean some type of disaster.

The arrival of this particular Hallucium however, was not to cause tribulation, quite the opposite actually. It had been sent, at this time by whom, it was not known, to that room, on that day with a single purpose in mind..... to protect the child, William. The great risk to the Hallucium's own life was unimportant. All it understood was at all cost it must succeed in its mission. Existence, not just for William, but for the Inside and Outside of all realities depended on its success. It was an immense obligation for one so small, considering the necessary consequences failure could initiate and whoever had tasked it with such a quest obviously had great faith in its abilities,

Immersed now in intense conversations of planning for the future, Emma and Tom failed to notice the huge, dark shadow that was beginning to invade the room, stifling out the light as it passed slowly across the sun lit floor. One by one they became encased within the damp blackness as it squeezed their bodies like a boa constrictor, forcing every ounce of life energy from their shells. Neither tried to escape nor cry out. It was as if they had been hypnotised by its power and submitted willingly to the force of this evil mass and join the black armies from whence the malevolent cloud had appeared. When the darkness had consumed that final spark of energy from its victim, it engulfed the lifeless form within the swirling mist before spewing it out and leaving nothing but a pile of white dust in its wake. Both casualties had remained motionless and awaited their fate as the nightmare forced its way slowly around the room consuming every ounce of life in its path as it moved towards William's cot.

The Hallucium, alerted by the sudden danger, moved swiftly passed the cloud and over to the child, leaving the mass to continue gorging upon the doomed couple. Once at the cot side of the child it peeked inside and was beholden by an unusual sight. Although William was still too young to focus on his surroundings, his eyes were opened wide in an attempt to see what was happening. It was impossible to assume he understood the danger he was in but an inner sense of self-preservation encouraged him to remain silent. A large tear fell from the Hallucium's eye as it gently pulled back the cover to take a closer look.

"Such innocence," it genuinely thought to itself. "If only you knew what path fate had set out for you"

With that William caught sight of the transparent form and a broad smile crept upon his face. The action was so deliberate the child must have seen the apparition standing before him.

“Would you be so pleased to see me if you understood what I must do?” the Hallucium whispered.

As the moment of sentiment passed, the creature turned its thoughts to the mission. Carefully, it lifted the child from the cot and scanned the room for means of a way out. By now the black mist had engulfed an entire room and blocked the entrance with its mass. Escape through the doorway appeared futile. Its thoughts were now in overload and his big black eyes were pulsating from left to right as the Hallucium looked for a means to elude the evil adversary. It was true it could melt into its surroundings but even a Hallucium was vulnerable and could also be ensnared by the lurking mass. Any attempted to make a break for it with William could be the last thing they ever did. The only obvious way out was through the open door into the light. Quickly, the Hallucium turned back to the cot. Resting beneath the tiny hospital bed was a full compliment of baby accessories, including an upturned baby bath. Carefully taking William from his bed the Hallucium swiftly lifted the corner of the bath and squeezed itself and the child under the plastic dome. Only a long tail-like appendage hung from one side and lashed out at the floor. With one whip from the digit, causing the immediate acceleration of a Ferrari, the wheeled cot scooted towards the doorway, pushing aside the mist as it forced its way through. A whispering groan from the darkness, of what could only be described as pain or perhaps disappointment, resounded around the room as the prey pierced through its masses and out into the corridor. For a split second the malevolent air was tempted to follow but the bustle and brightness of the hospital was more than a match for its blackened swirls and so, accepting defeat this time, it pulled in its mass and disappeared from whence it came.

Once into the corridor, the cot quickly came to a halt. The Hallucium could not afford to take the risk of being followed and as bright light was the only known deterrent of the mists, the open corridors seemed to be a temporary haven. A foe like this whilst in pursuit of its prey did not normally break the boundaries of reality and announce itself to the world. The Hallucium knew the rules but still it would feel far safer when they had both reached their destination and so, calling upon his powers of disguise, the creature and William melted into the taupe-walled background and quietly walked along the corridor unnoticed. Or so it believed.

“Mummy, look a pixie!” cried a little girl, as she was being wheeled by a hospital porter passed the Hallucium.

“Don’t be silly darling,” her mother assured her. “There aren’t any Pixie’s in hospital. It’s just the drugs you have been given.”

“But, but mummy. It is a Pixie.” The child pleaded.

“There, there Elizabeth,” the mother replied as she patted the child’s hand. “Of course it is dear,” she mumbled sympathetically.

The Hallucium, amused by the situation could not help itself. After all, its kind had earned the reputation of a gremlin that played pranks and sometimes a little mischief was too hard to resist. With devilment in mind, it ran up to Elizabeth, flicked her nose with his long stringy fingers and stuck its tongue out at her.

“Take that.” It thought to itself with glee.

“Mummy he pinched my nose.” Elizabeth cried as she began to massage the tip of her nose where the blow had landed.

Her moans however, fell on deaf ears as the impatient porter wheeled her away. Wanting a last look, Elizabeth twisted around in her chair trying to catch another glimpse of the creature. It smiled and waved its hand in a friendly manner. The pain to her nose was short lived as her face lit up with delight and a huge, toothy smile returned the farewell gesture.

“Goodbye” she mouthed silently.

As the sick child disappeared from sight the Hallucium’s light-hearted mood changed once more and its thoughts returned to the more serious matter at hand, the safety of its young charge. The hospital, once a safe haven was now one of the most dangerous places for them to take refuge. From the moment William was born, the controller of the black mist became aware of his existence as the enthused energy of the child’s life force called out to the path of his destiny. This invisible link would always be a beacon to his whereabouts, although it could be possible to disguise it within a family unit of trust and love, a place, where the black mist would not dare to infiltrate, hence the reason for the destruction of every living relative; of his mother and even her closest friends.

The task ahead for the Hallucium was a difficult one but it had taken great time to prepare for this mission, an assignment far too important to fail. As it looked down at the child in its arms, for a split second in time it fully understood the significance in protecting him and keeping him safe from danger. Before this day, its mission had been just that. An exercise in which it was to follow orders without question but now in that brief moment of studying William, it sensed

deep within itself the true power of the tiny being. The energy was unnerving but somehow comforting as well. It was imperative at all costs that he should grow and develop into a man and for the Hallucium as his guardian, it would be a task of many perils.

Through the crowds of patients and visitors they continued to wander unnoticed along the corridor. The Hallucium, taking full advantage of the mayhem casually dawdled towards the main entrance of the hospital, whilst still nervously surveying every angle around them. With each step closer to freedom, it sensed trepidation from the shadowed walls and the transparent hairs running down its back began to tingle and stand on end. This was a warning sign, an omen of imminent danger.

“Perhaps the front door is not the best approach,” it mumbled to itself. “Let’s find some other way to leave this building?” and with that it veered off to the left following a thick yellow line painted on the floor. “Ah! This will do I think, the symbol of the sun.” It muttered again.

Perhaps to them, colours had no names but the Hallucium took comfort in the bright yellow hue and was convinced it would lead them to safety. As it walked along the endless corridors, not once did it feel deterred. Freedom was at hand, it was just a question of finding it.

Eventually, after one final turn it found itself in a large steamy room. Noises from enormous rotating drums filled the air with deafening regularity. This was the laundry room and where there was laundry, it could be expected there was also an exit.

With the deftness of a cat and skill of a spy it crept passed the busily working staff and found its way to the exit. The large roller door was open wide to enable the steam to evaporate much quicker and allow fresh air to circulate around. Brilliant late afternoon sunlight drenched the metal frame as brightness cast a huge smile across the doorway.

“Freedom” sighed, the Hallucium.

With a quick glance over its shoulder, it made a dash for the outside world. For the time being, they would both be safe.

Once out into the open, it took to the streets. Normally, it would have hidden itself within the shadows but that was now too dangerous. The mist had already discovered that refuge. From now on sunlight would be their protection but with dusk fast approaching and closely ensued by the night, it was imperative that William was within

the boundaries of safety as soon as possible. Once darkness had filled the skies, his life would be in jeopardy once more.

Through busy streets and traffic jams the Hallucium moved swiftly on. The secret destination, known only to itself, was just outside the city limits. Even at the pace the creature moved would only just ensure the child's security by a matter of minutes. If life in every form was to eke out an existence, William had to remain undetected for many years. The only chance now, was luck and hope, optimism that if he did manage to evolve into the being that was expected of him, he would be strong enough to defend against his oncoming destiny.

A mile or two further on and the drone of vehicles forcing their way home was just a distant buzz in the background. The scenery had now changed from high-rise buildings and littered, un-kept streets to one of greenery and tranquillity. Only the twittering of birds and the rustle of leaves being blown in the late summer breeze was all that was noticeable now but still the Hallucium continued its journey as the evening dusk began to fill the skies. With a sense of urgency, it quickened its pace to escape any imminent attack. Great relief swept through its undefined body and it smiled as it noticed in the distance, a light, beaming out from below the brow of the hill, silhouetting a haven against the sky. They had made it. William would be safe and for the time being the Hallucium could rest on its vigil over its precious charge.

As they approached the large country cottage, the creature noticed the outer buildings and scoured around with vigilant eyes. Four large ram-shackled barns protected the outer parameter of the grounds and a rusty, old discarded tractor, stood threateningly to the left of the broken gateway. This was definitely the place. A strong light spewed out into the half lit skies and as the Hallucium peered in through the window, it could see a friendly, burning hearth, heating a cosy room from the late summer chill. It nodded to itself with approval in discovering such a perfect hideaway and prayed that its efforts would stay an enigma for many years to come.

Carefully, it rewrapped the blanket around the now tiny, sleeping form and tenderly laid him down on the stone doorstep. A brief smile of smug satisfaction spread across the Hallucium's face. It had achieved its mission and the link now created between them would warn him of any subsequent danger. Almost reluctantly it banged on the wooden door and stepped back into the shadows.

After a few minutes several bolts were drawn to unlock the door. Slowly, it partially opened and two eyes peered through the tiny

crevice out into the dim light. It took several seconds before they registered upon the tiny bundle lying on the doorstep. Instantly, the door flew open and a middle-aged man appeared. His face was well worn and wrinkled and did not reflect his actual age. Lines of hardship had taken their toll. Despite this however, his smile was one of warmth and trust and in that instant, the Hallucium knew that it made the right decision in leaving such a precious treasure entrusted to the couple.

“Nancy, come quickly my dear,” he urged excitedly as he carefully lifted William from the doorstep. “Another child has been left. That’s two in the last month and it’s another boy. Why on earth do these young girls have their babies if they do not intend to look after them? It just isn’t fair on the child.”

“I know Charlie” Nancy replied as she approached him and lifted William from his arms. “That’s why we run this place isn’t it? To help these poor children at least try and have a normal life. Does he have a name?”

“Yes my dear he does,” Charlie replied. “It looks as though he has come straight from the hospital. He’s still wearing the hospital tag. Whoever his mother was, she wanted to call him William.”

“Then William it shall be,” smiled Nancy as she closed the door behind her.

§ § § § §

When the Nurse returned to Emma’s room some hours later to ask her visitor to leave, she could hardly believe her eyes. Darkness had already consumed the room and as she turned on the light a gasp of incredulity emitted automatically from her mouth. The room was empty apart from a two piles of a white, sand- like substance littering the floor and bed. Even the tiny cot was missing. For a brief moment, terror swept across the nurse’s mind before she managed to compose herself. However was she going to explain this incident? Not an easy task considering patient, child and the visitor had now apparently disappeared. This was something for the Hospital administrators to cover up and not her problem to deal with so she felt silence about the event would be in her best interests. Still, the fear of something evil and unknown lurking in the shadows of her workplace would mean many a sleepless night would follow.

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