

Awake

By Egan Yip

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ISBN-13:

Printed in the United States of America

This book is dedicated first and foremost to the One for whom this book was written, then to my loving family.

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- Breaking Point -

Kevin Stiles stared at the computer screen, his wide eyes twitching.

It was Monday morning. He had just finished pulling an all-nighter to work on his research paper. And now it was finally done. Well, not exactly *done*...but it was close enough. Conclusion? *Screw it*, he decided.

He looked at his wristwatch. 7:20. He had five minutes to reach the bus stop.

Kevin glanced down at his clothes: a simple t-shirt and blue jeans. It was what he had worn the day before, but now was not the time to be picky, even if his clothes did smell slightly of old socks. He printed out his homework and shoved it down his backpack. On his way out he stopped by the bathroom, splashed cold water on his face, combed his hair, gargled with mouthwash and dabbled a bit of cologne over his shirt—all under thirty seconds. Then he rushed to the front door and eyed the table of the living room. His lunch bag wasn't there.

Kevin heaved a sigh. *Mom forgot. Again. I guess I'll just have to buy lunch.*

Out the door he went, hurrying to the far end of the driveway. Andrew Shoemaker, his next-door neighbor, sat on the curb, leaning against the oak tree. Andrew had on a dress shirt and baggy slacks. Within this suburban area, they both attended the same public school, Rockville Middle. They were both in the eighth grade. In fact, Andrew also attended a few of his classes, though Kevin couldn't really remember which ones.

Kevin stood next to Andrew, glimpsing at his watch again. 7:25. He looked down the street. No sign of the bus. No loud screeching. No flashing lights. Nothing. Though the bus driver was known to be punctual, it wouldn't be the first time she was late.

Tired, Kevin closed his eyes for a moment. Andrew played with a broken stick, tapping it against the asphalt. They both waited quietly for the bus to arrive. The silence lasted for a while.

Andrew finally spoke up and said, “What time is it?”

Kevin took one hard look at the time. “Seven forty-five!”

“School’s going to start,” said Andrew. “Maybe we should walk. It’s only two miles.”

“Only two miles?” Kevin rolled his eyes. “Can your parents give us a ride?”

Andrew shook his head. “My mom’s working.”

“Same. My parents are always out the door at seven.” Kevin sighed. “Looks like we don’t have a choice. We’re going to be late.”

They headed down Grace Drive, quietly following the sidewalk. The silence made Kevin uncomfortable. He felt the need to say something. However, they never really talked much and had almost nothing in common.

Kevin said suddenly, “Aren’t you in my history class?”

Andrew replied, “Front row. Third seat.”

“Did you do the research paper?”

“Just barely. Did it all last night.”

“Me too!” Kevin chuckled. “It was like midnight when I remembered to do it! I typed it up all morning. Just used websites for sources. What’d you do yours on?”

“Alexander Hamilton.”

“Wow, the guy who discovered electricity?”

“You’re probably thinking of Benjamin Franklin—though I wouldn’t say he *discovered* electricity.”

“Then the guy who invented the telephone?”

“Alexander Bell.”

Kevin’s interest waned. “Well, whatever. Hamilton’s probably not that famous anyway.”

Andrew raised a brow but stayed silent.

On their way to school they passed by a large house surrounded by short walls of stone. It was eye-catching to say the least—with its pink window frames and red roof. A black cat reclined on the wall, licking itself clean. It stopped as soon as it caught Kevin’s attention. Its eyes glazed, it stared at the two boys as they walked past. Kevin couldn’t help but stare at its dilating pupils. The cat’s gaze was entrancing.

From out of nowhere a yellow Labrador rushed to the wall, barking profusely at the cat. Startled by it, Kevin averted his eyes, hoping not to catch the mutt's attention. After the two boys reached the end of the block, the barking stopped. Kevin glanced back. The two animals sat beside each other, watching the boys disappear around the corner. Kevin looked at Andrew to see if he was also curious about it, but Andrew paid it no mind. Kevin couldn't resist taking another look. That scene kept replaying in his head. He spun around. However, the animals were gone.

"What's wrong?" Andrew asked, looking concerned.

Kevin rubbed his eyes. "I don't know. I think I'm starting to see things."

"I know what you mean," said Andrew. "Lack of sleep will do that to you."

Kevin and Andrew finally arrived at Rockville Middle School. Compared to the other schools nearby, Rockville Middle was pretty new. Built only ten years ago, the school looked modern, clean and sturdy. The American flag rested on a tall pole in a circular driveway. A long canopy served as shade for the front entrance, covering several rows of benches. It usually had buses flowing in and out, but then again, they were nearly fifteen minutes late. All the buses were probably long gone by now.

However, Kevin did find something most odd. The glass doors of the entrance were closed.

The two boys stood in front of the school, exchanging glances.

Kevin said, "Today *is* Monday, right?"

Andrew scratched his head. "Yesterday was Sunday...."

"Could it be a Holiday?"

"March twenty-third? What holiday would that be?"

"Spring break?"

"That's in April for us."

"Hmm..." Kevin pondered for a moment. He said half in jest, "Maybe it's a new late-kids-aren't-allowed-in policy."

Andrew replied, "Isn't that against the law?"

Abruptly, someone came from behind them and pushed Andrew aside. He winced.

"Out of the way," a girl growled.

Kevin looked to his left. A girl brushed past them. Katie Evans. He recognized her from math class—though she hadn't showed up in class for the longest time.

Katie's black hair reached her shoulders, hanging over her face. She straightened out her dark blue jacket as she approached the front doors. Katie rattled the handle. The door didn't budge. Exasperated, she kicked the door, screaming.

Kevin said flatly, "It's locked."

Katie glared at him. "You think I didn't figure that out?"

Kevin raised a brow at her, shaking his head. "I didn't say—"

"Shut up and watch," she snapped, grabbing a lone brick from the grass nearby. The brick must've been left over from the construction. Kevin cocked his head.

Katie pulled her arm back and then launched the brick into the door with all her might. The glass shattered, scattering shards all over the concrete, tiles and grass. There was now a big opening through the doorframe.

Kevin stared at the broken door, his mouth agape. He shouted, "WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU'RE DOING?"

Katie laughed loudly. "How's that for locked?" She brushed the broken glass aside with her sneakers, carefully stepping over the threshold. Kevin and Andrew cautiously followed her.

Once inside, Kevin snapped, "I can't believe you just did that. Aren't you afraid of getting in trouble?"

"No one's going to find out who did it. And you'd be dumber than dumb to rat." She snickered, "I'll be going to class now. Don't bother thanking me. Just buy me lunch and we'll call it even." She waved goodbye and left.

Kevin shot her a dirty look as she stopped by her locker. "She's got some screws loose." He motioned for Andrew to follow him. "We'd better get out of here before someone sees us."

The halls were dead silent. Normally, everyone would be sitting in class by now. Though the halls were usually quiet at this time, it was typical to hear the mumble of lectures or class discussions. But today was extra quiet. The only sounds they heard were the annoying squeaks of their sneakers echoing off the walls.

They arrived at the door of the main office. Kevin knocked. No response. He knocked again, just in case. There was still no response. Kevin slowly twisted the doorknob and opened the door.

The room was empty. Not a single person in sight. He could see no sign of anyone having been in there recently.

“This is getting really weird and freaky,” said Kevin. “No buses. No one at school. It’s Monday! Where’d everyone go?”

Andrew said, “Maybe today *is* a day off. It’s not like it always has to be a real holiday.”

“Then how come no one told us about it?”

“Look,” said Andrew, pointing down the hall. “It’s Katie! She didn’t go to class.”

Kevin caught a fleeting sight of her as she ran past. “Looks like she’s going home.”

“Maybe we should just go home.”

“Not yet.” Kevin reached into his pocket and pulled out his cell phone. “I think I’ll call Brad. See what he’s up to. Maybe he’s got some answers.”

Kevin called his friend. It rang three times. No one answered. He quickly canceled the call and tried again. No one was picking up.

Frustrated, Kevin grunted, “He’s not answering. He always sleeps in when there’s no school.”

“That’s okay,” said Andrew dryly. “I think I’ll just go home.”

Kevin thought of something. “Hey, let’s stop by his place and see if he’s home. He lives really close to school. Just up the road.”

“Is that okay? I don’t know him.”

“Sure. He’s fine with everything. If he’s home, we can hang out. He won’t mind.”

Brad’s house was located in a residential community behind the school. It was a two-story house with blue siding. Kevin knocked on the door a few times and rang the bell twice.

Andrew glanced around the exterior of the home in great interest. Though it wasn’t really that amazing of a house, it was definitely a step up from his neighborhood.

Kevin folded his arms. He waited but no one came to the door. “I wonder where everyone went.” He reached into his pocket for a key.

Andrew looked at him, curious. “You have a key to his house?”

Kevin unlocked the door and entered. “Our families are really close. I stop by after school pretty often.”

They crossed the hall, stomping dirt over the brown rug. The furnished living room was on their right and the fancy dining room

was on the left. The wooden stairs ahead curved upward to the second floor.

Kevin ran up the staircase, yelling, “Brad! Are you here?” Kevin went straight for his friend’s room. The door was closed. He rapped on the door and said, “I’m coming in.” He slowly opened the door and peered inside. Brad was in bed, snoring loudly. Resting by the side of his bed was his collie, Max. The dog raised his head to look up at Kevin as he entered the room.

Kevin’s eyes narrowed. “I knew it! You *were* sleeping!” He stood by the bed and gently shook it. “Wake up. It’s almost nine. I said WAKE UP!” He screamed into Brad’s ear, smacked his shoulder and finally jostled the bed. Brad continued sleeping. He didn’t even stir.

Andrew heard the yelling. He stood by the door of the bedroom. “Is everything all right?”

Kevin startled tickling Brad by the neck and waist. Brad just rolled over. “Wow, he’s usually pretty ticklish.” With a sly grin, Kevin told Andrew, “Get me some ice.”

Andrew nodded and left the room.

While waiting for Andrew to return, Kevin took Brad’s pillow and whacked him over the face with it. He yelled and shouted with all the air in his lungs. He kicked the footboard. Nothing he did managed to even disturb Brad’s deep sleep. When Andrew came back with a mug full of ice cubes, he handed it to Kevin. Kevin took an ice cube and rubbed it all over Brad’s face. After feeling the cold moisture on his face, Brad twitched, but that was it. Max cocked his head and whined, as though he disapproved of what the boys were doing to his owner.

Kevin said hesitantly, “Brad, come on...wake up already. This is getting ridiculous.”

Then, as Kevin stared at Brad, an idea popped in his head—a strange idea...one that was impossible. It was totally unrealistic, like something out of a bad horror flick. Kevin thought, *What if he couldn’t wake up?*

As he pondered over this concept, he began recalling simple things. His mom didn’t leave the lunch bag on the table like she usually did. And the whole way they walked to school, they did not see a car, or a single person other than Katie. He wondered about the

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