

## **Waking Dream: Devlin**

### **Prologue**

#### Chester, Virginia

Tristan Jude got out of his beat up Chevy S-10 and resumed the work he had neglected for three months. He was a handsome young man despite the cowl of unkempt hair, scraggly beard, and the haunted look of despair, hopelessness, and resolve in his dark brown eyes. Every Friday he came to the busy intersection to try to minister his fellow Dreamers, no matter how fruitless it seemed. The world was crumbling, and even though it was subtle, it was unmistakably unbalanced. He knew what was coming, because he'd lived through it before. It was only now that he was aware of it. All his past lives had converged on that single moment. He had done this before. It had all been interrupted and he wasted no time getting back to work.

Tristan wore the same clothes he'd been wearing since his release from the Tucker Psychiatric clinic, the third time in less than a year. He had been admitted most recently when his seemingly schizophrenic rants scared the locals into calling the police. Like the times before, he played their game, took the pills, attended lamentable group therapy sessions, and told his life story repeatedly. He never let on about all his disembodied friends surrounding him. It concerned him how narrow minded the staff at the facility had been. They had limited understanding of the human mind, an antenna tuned to the music of the universe.

He was released after a ninety day period of observation. Tristan felt no need to wait to resume his work and Fridays seemed to be the best days to catch his fellow Dreamers. He had to tell the world what he knew, what he saw, what he had seen coming for many years. He wanted to share the memories flooding to him through his tether to the Spaces Between and his unseen friends, a function of his Awakening. He did not want the world to perish. Something deep inside

drove him to warn those who remained complacent and blissfully unaware of the events unfolding right before their very eyes. The end, truly, was nigh.

It was five p.m. He had chosen that particular location at the intersection right in front of the local drugstore because it had a great deal of traffic. He felt that particular spot had significance, though he was not entirely sure why. As the traffic queued up at the light, he pulled several makeshift signs, small billboards, and a sandwich board from the back of the beat up vehicle that his uncle had given him. His uncle, Peter Jude, was a recluse who lived on the outskirts of the quaint town south of Richmond. He knew Tristan wasn't insane, but there was little he could do to help. Peter Jude had his own demons to confront. Most of the town viewed the Judes as peculiar. They would tolerate some of their nuttiness as long as it didn't disturb the peace or bring scandal into the small southern town.

Tristan was anxious for his friends to return to him, and he hoped that would be the night. He had been on lithium for months, a drug which suppressed his Weirdness. He knew that his friends were not a figment of his imagination. They were visitors from another place he knew existed, but didn't quite understand.

"Good evening, Tristan," said Robert, one of his unseen friends who seated himself on the curb to watch the cars pass on that cold evening. He was dressed as they did in the 1950's, looking somewhat like a detective. "How have you been? We've been wondering how long it would be this time."

"Hi, Robert," replied Tristan with a hint of relief in his voice. "I was wondering the same. I'm glad you were able to find me again."

Robert glanced back over his shoulder. “We’ve been looking for you, but it seems the medication they gave you blocked our ability to find you. It was only this morning that we sensed you were connected once more.”

Tristan nodded slowly. “It felt like I was constantly floating in a fog, but wanting to crawl out of my skin at the same time.” He frowned. “It was rather upsetting for sure. What about Mary?”

“She’ll be here.” Robert looked back to the traffic. “And remember, don’t speak to the Sleepers, they’ll just lock you up again.”

“I know that now.” His most recent incarceration was due to overzealousness with a particular stranger who stopped to hear his message. He exerted his persuasive abilities, only to terrify the woman. Sleepers were unable to see the true nature of reality, the Waking Dream in which all people exist. Trying to awaken a Sleeper to the truth only caused anger and fear.

“I’ll let you know which ones to target,” said Robert, always the pragmatist. “Though there seems to be quite a few Dreamers nearby.”

“That’s good to know.” Tristan busied himself, set up his signs and pulled out his fliers.

He leaned a large sign against the lamppost that read, “The End Times Approach! Ask Me for more Information!” He set up a few others with similar messages, “Beware the coming Twilight!” and “Dream with your eyes open!” He donned the sandwich board that displayed a large, primitive eye with three rays emanating from it on the back, and the message, “It’s all just a Waking Dream,” on the front.

Tristan knew that the end times were coming and he felt compelled to warn other Dreamers like himself. A terrible plot which had yet to be revealed was underway, and the more Dreamers aware of it, the better their chance to survive. He was puzzled that the world could be

so unaware of something so blatant. Things were spiraling out of control. It was apparent in news from all across the world. There was so much unrest and so much suffering. All of it was unnecessary, but anyone who spoke up was institutionalized and drugged. Almost all of the people in his therapy sessions were Dreamers, yet he never once uttered a word to them about his visions and otherworldly knowledge.

“Hi, Sugar.” Mary walked up to Tristan, appearing from nowhere, shimmering into existence like a sudden flurry of snow. He did not know exactly what they did when they were not with him. All he knew was that they were there to help him because they were just as invested in the survival of the world as he was.

“Mary!” he exclaimed happily. Tristan was hopelessly in love with her and just seeing her twisted his stomach into a knot of nervousness, anxiousness and happiness. He lamented her absence the most while locked away in that dingy room in the psych ward, medicated, melancholy, and misplaced. He vowed never to return to that place. Death would be better. “I’m glad you’re here tonight. I have missed you.”

She smiled, dressed in a flapper dress, emerald eyes glistening with the setting sun, and short auburn curls poking from beneath her hat.

“You know I wouldn’t leave you here all alone,” she said dreamily. “You’re my favorite fella, after all.” Then she winked.

“Soon, maybe we can actually have that dance you always talk about.”

“I am sure of it. I hate that you can’t remember the many times we danced in the past. But when you do...” She smiled softly.

“How can you remember, yet I cannot?”

“You hadn’t yet Awakened from the slumber,” she explained. “This is your first time being Awakened, though you’ve been here so many times before.”

Tristan nodded silently, but his attention was drawn to a man who had rolled down his window at the red light.

“Get your crazy ass outta here,” the driver shouted, enraged by the messages on the signs. “We don’t need crazy around here, asshole.”

“Sleeper,” Robert responded, glanced back at Tristan then returned his attention to the cars in line.

Tristan offered a smile. “Free speech. It’s why I love this country, my friend.” He held out a pamphlet to the man then used his Weirdness to turn the light green and hurry the man on his way.

“Fuck you, ya nut job.” The man rolled up the window and sped off.

“Why do they hate me?” Tristan asked, not caring that it looked like he was talking to himself.

“Because they know they aren’t in control, doll,” Mary placed her hand on his shoulder but it simply passed through incorporeally and fell once more to her side. “And the fact that you are Awakened enrages them all the more. They can see it in you, it gives you inner strength and emanates from you, unsettling them.”

“Don’t let them get to you,” Robert added. “They also sense that the end is near because they are the ones most at risk. If the Sleepers are disrupted, it’ll make it harder for all of us to return.”

Tristan nodded, as if he knew what Robert meant, but he did not fully understand the cycle. All he knew was that he had to alert those like himself, those who could hopefully survive the dark times to come and, the end of life as they'd all known it for so very long.

“What did I miss?” Stephen Caine, another of Tristan’s special friends crossed the street, walking through the cars, other cars passing through him as he moved like a ghost.

“Well we’ve had our first jerk of the night,” reported Mary as she took a seat on the sidewalk, looking between Stephen and Tristan.

“Dreamer,” Robert interrupted, pointing to a white BMW rolling to stop in front of Tristan. The car had a personalized license plate with the name JUSTIN framed in gold.

The driver, presumably a man named Justin, looked to be in his mid-twenties, not much younger than Tristan. For some reason he looked very familiar, and the driver had the same twinkle of recognition in his eyes.

They locked gazes for a short time then the driver motioned at Tristan’s propaganda before lowering the window.

“When?” asked the driver in a silky, confident voice, a smirk curling his lips.

“Soon,” replied Tristan hesitantly, offering a pamphlet. “Sooner than you think.”

“Be careful, sugar,” Mary warned, standing to take a closer look at the driver. “Wait a minute...”

“Wait a minute, what?” Justin looked directly at Mary.

Her eyes widened as Robert and Stephen came to her side.

“You can see her?” Tristan said with confusion and disbelief in his voice.

“You’re not the only one who can see, my friend.” The man offered an eerie smile.

“We should go,” Mary turned fearfully to Tristan. “It’s him,” she whispered. “The Beast.”

She moved closer, trying to put herself between Tristan and the driver but found she was unable, as if repelled by an unseen wall.

“Beast?” Tristan looked at Mary then Justin.

“I’m not interested in any of you, young ones,” assured the driver with a dark smile. “I’ll be seeing you soon enough, when I am free to roam as I wish.”

Tristan willed the light to turn green, but it immediately turned red again, causing the cars behind to blare their horns.

“Poor, Tristan.” Justin chuckled, then flicked his hand to silence the horns all at once. “You really should have just stayed locked up in that little room and waited for it all to be over. You’d have been much safer with the rest of the forgotten ones. But now, I won’t be able to forget you.”

“Tristan,” Mary urged. “Please.”

“How do you know me?” insisted Tristan, taking a step closer to the vehicle. “How?”

“You already know all the answers,” replied the driver with a hint of contempt in his voice. “But your purity has blinded you. You’ll realize it when it’s too late to do anything about it.”

Unbeknownst to Tristan and his friends, a cop car had pulled into the drug store parking lot. A large, dark haired officer came up behind and gripped Tristan’s arm.

“Move it,” he barked at the driver.

The driver smiled. “Too bad for you. Ta-ta.” The white BMW sped off as the light turned green.

“Let’s go,” the officer said, pulling out his handcuffs. “You were told to stay away.”

“Run!” Mary and the others screamed, and that’s just what Tristan did. He pulled free from the officer and jumped the small hedge between the sidewalk and the parking lot.

“Hey!” The officer pulled out his nightstick and gave pursuit. “Stop now!”

Tristan had been locked up for so long that he wasn’t in the best of shape. He ran hard but as he rounded the corner, he felt a burst of pain in the middle of the back as the nightstick made contact. He staggered forward and fell to the ground, skidding across the coarse pavement.

“No!” Mary screamed helplessly then vanished with the others.

Tristan struggled to get up but the officer was upon him, pinning his head to the pavement with his knee while he grabbed one of his arms.

“You just couldn’t leave well enough alone.” The officer hissed against his ear in a different voice than before. “But now you’ve attracted someone else’s attention.” He quickly clipped the handcuffs and Tristan tried to muster his will to fight, but without results.

“Ha,” the officer scoffed. “You really don’t know how deep in shit you are, do you?”

A precise blow delivered to the back of Tristan’s head offered stars then sudden darkness.

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He awoke slowly to the sounds of wailing and babbling all around. Tristan’s head screamed with pain as he opened his eyes. He was lying on a padded floor in a padded room. From above he could see a dull, red glow of light that cast a lattice pattern all around him. As his vision sharpened, he could see a grid of bars above, and beyond that the ceiling seemed to be far above, as if in a warehouse.

He tried to move against the binds of a strait jacket. He was drugged, removing his Weirdness, and he believed himself to be alone.

“You have become a thorn,” a dark voice called from above. “It was just a matter of time before you figured it all out. We can’t have you interrupting the plan. We are too close to ending this miserable dream.”

Tristan strained to see who was speaking, but all he could identify was the silhouette of a large figure speaking down through the caged ceiling. All around, he could hear the desperate cries of hundreds, perhaps thousands, of voices all in lamentation.

“Where am I?” Tristan slurred. He was more heavily drugged than he had been at the clinic.

“This,” the voice continued, “is your new home. At least until it’s all over.”

Tristan tried to sit up, struggling to get a look at his tormentor. “Why? Why?” he pleaded.

“Why?” The voice chuckled. “Why not is the more apt question. You and the rest of your kind,” the figure spread his arms wide, “have squandered everything you’ve been given. You’ve created a loathsome reality and overpopulated this world with mindless automatons because you’re too lazy to take control of the dream yourselves. That is why. You could have saved yourself, but this insipid need to warn the others has earned you a cage.” The figure leaned down, the shadow enveloping Tristan in darkness. “At least until we’ve drained every last bit of your will. It’s a pity you’ve had such a short time to experience the brilliance of Awakening, but that will be over soon.”

“Mary,” Tristan whispered. It was all he could think at that moment. He wondered how he would ever find her or whether he would ever see her again. It filled him with profound sorrow.

“Oh, you’ll have plenty of time to spend with that whore,” the figure replied, turning to leave. “Unfortunately, you won’t be seeing her for quite a while. Even now, your Weirdness is

draining away. Medication is a wonder. I find it amusing that your kind is so easily addicted to disconnecting from the dream. Willing to take any pill or injection that will remove responsibility for your miserable lives.”

“You made...I...didn’t...” Tristan struggled against falling unconscious. “You medicated...”

“Yes.” The figure above him purred. “Now, at the end of it all, you’ve figured it all out.” The silhouette was gone, yet as it receded it said, “Sleep now, Tristan.”

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“I don’t have much time, sugar,” Mary’s voice echoed in his head.

He was sleeping but he was not dreaming, drifting in a familiar place, but he could see nothing.

“Mary?” he whispered in the darkness.

“You must resist,” she said with urgency, though her presence soothed and calmed him. “I will send someone for you. Just hold on as long as you can.”

“Where am I?” he pleaded. The darkness closed in on him from everywhere, oppressive and cold, like Antarctica during the long night.

“Just hold on and resist the medication,” she continued. “It’s worse than we thought. We’ve all been deceived so thoroughly, there is no way to stop it.”

“I want to leave this place,” Tristan pleaded. “I’m so cold. I’m so tired.”

“Soon, sugar,” she consoled. “Soon”

As her voice faded into the darkness, Tristan awoke to a large man trying to force a pill into his mouth. He struggled as consciousness returned to him. He could feel a small amount of his Weirdness returning as the earlier dose wore off.

“Jus’ take it and you can go back to night, night,” the orderly said.

Tristan mustered every bit of his will, Mary’s voice still fresh in his mind. He locked gazes with the orderly and spoke with strength in his tone. “You’ve already given it to me.”

The orderly paused. He was a Sleeper, but under the control of his unseen jailors. “No I didn’t.”

“Yes,” Tristan said with more force. “You did.”

The orderly considered, looked down at the pill then back to Tristan. “You’re right, nut bag.” He thrust Tristan roughly on the floor. “Wouldn’t want to kill you just yet. Management wouldn’t be happy.” He chuckled and left the room.

Tristan lay trembling, staring up into the darkness of his prison and he felt a strange sensation overtake his body. As he gazed into the inky darkness above, he noticed a small pinprick of light, cobalt blue at first then it became brilliant white. It mesmerized him, and he felt as he did when he Awakened after his first visit to the psych ward, but this was very different.

As the radiance grew, it cast an ethereal light around him, warming him, comforting him. Then suddenly, all of his previous lives poured into his mind. He was like a person recovering from amnesia. Paris, New Orleans, Berlin, Williamsburg, Seattle, Moscow, Gettysburg, Omaha, Detroit, London, Jerusalem, Mecca. All the places he had lived and all the people he had been. The memories were like a deluge, filling him with all the knowledge he had acquired but forgotten with each new reincarnation. It was a swirling miasma of thoughts, dreams, people, places and professions. Within that cloud of blended history, one thing remained constant. Mary, his Fairy in Red. She was in every moment, waiting patiently for that dance he’d never danced, but always wanted. Every kiss they had ever shared, every reunion and every departure, filled and emptied him as if he were experiencing them for the first time all at once.

“Mary,” he whispered with a smile, despite the dire aspect of his current situation. “It always feels like the first time.”

The glow slowly dimmed, like stars each night on the cloak of Erebus. But that light remained, burned into his mind, opening a door that had been closed to him for so many centuries, so many lives. Tristan knew in that brief moment that he had finally attained Immortality and now he could be with Mary, but first he would have to complete the mission that he began centuries earlier.

In that dank padded cell with the wails of the lost souls surrounding him, he began to formulate a plan of his own. He processed all of his experiences through all of his lives, and Tristan understood that every problem had a solution. Arrogance was his jailor’s one weakness. He had seen it destroy so many over the course of his existence. He’d have to find the one thing that had been overlooked, perhaps forgotten. The quintessential chink in the man’s armor.

Lying still, he knew he’d be all right and would endure the times to come. He couldn’t reveal that he had attained a new level of awareness, and hoped it had not been recognized.

He’d wait until someone came as Mary promised. While he waited he would listen, because in the cries of the others surrounding him, there would be clues to it all. The facility staff was drugging those Dreamers to keep them from manipulating the dream or interrupting their treacherous plot. He had no idea how long it had been going on or to what extent it had spread across the world, but he would find out.

Once he was released from that prison, he’d tell the world and prepare them for the difficulties ahead. He was only one man who used to stand on that corner pleading for others to listen, but now he was much more than that. He had always been much more than that. He knew he was meant to write, and remembered that his first book had been read and studied for

centuries. He had to find his inspiration, compel the Dreamers to awaken, and expose these false teachers for what they were. His eyes were open, and he would ensure that they would be returned to the darkness between the darkness.