

The Awakening

by

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I feel a tingling in my left toes. I think it's a tingling, but it could be a slight pain. With no other feeling in my body as a reference, I can't tell for sure.

A slight pain or tingling.

Certainly not a real, deep pain. That I would recognize.

The pain seems to have awakened me. Everything else is blank. Other than the toes on my left foot, I can't sense or feel the rest of my body.

Even my breathing and heartbeat are somehow masked.

My mind, too, is blank.

I sense the pain, and these thoughts come to me, but that's all. I can't remember anything else.

It's like you feel when you've been knocked unconscious, and slowly come out of it. You feel woozy and disoriented. At first you don't remember anything — your name, where you are, or who you are. Nothing. You're just there. Then gradually, the information that is you is slowly fed back into your mind.

That's how I feel.

Except, all those thoughts that I should be recalling still won't come.

Rather, the pain in my toes is fading.

And as it fades away, my mind fades

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The feeling in my toes is back, but extends beyond my ankle into my calf. And it definitely is a tingling, not a pain.

I "woke up" again when the tingling returned.

At least, I guess I woke up when the tingling returned. I passed out when it disappeared last time, and now I awake as it returning. It's as if the pain is the proof of my existence that my mind needs to be aware.

This time I feel better. I still can't remember anything that happened before I awoke with the pain (yes, it is a pain again), but at least I can remember that last time! It proves that my mind can retain thoughts.

I must be in a hospital. If somebody weren't taking care of me, I wouldn't have awakened the second time. Maybe I was in a bad accident, and they've had to keep me sedated to mend me. Perhaps they've given me both local and general anesthetics.

When the anesthetic begins to wear off, my mind awakens me to the pain.
When they give me the medication again I pass out.

It must have been one hell of an accident to leave me in this bad a shape. At least I'm alive. If I weren't alive and getting better, they would not bother to give me anesthetics and try to patch me up.

As I get better, I've got to keep from going stir crazy. If I don't watch out, I'll be a babbling idiot by the time I'm fully healed. I can do it if I keep remembering that the pain and unconsciousness mean that I'm getting better.

This time I am more aware of what's happening. The pain is receding down my leg into my foot.

Soon it will disappear.

I'm losing consciousness, too. . . .

I must have been right last time because I can feel almost all of my left leg now. Not just the tingling or the pain, though those are still there. I think I can actually feel the clamminess of the skin. At this rate the doctors will have me together in a week or two.

A week or two?

Am I assuming that my periods of wakefulness and unconsciousness follow a twenty-four hour, day-night cycle? Why not?

It's as good an assumption as any. Last time I must have been getting foggy earlier than I thought. Because if I think only about the pain, I'll go crazy. I've got to occupy myself with something more concrete and important.

Who I am?

That's as good as anything. After all, what is more important? If I devote all of my energies to figuring out who I am, then I should get through any barrier that exists in my mind. But I've got to be logical. I must carefully keep a mental record of my progress. I have to keep it straight, from one awakening to the next.

I'm human.

How can I tell? From the pain in my leg, it seems to be human in shape, and I feel human. So I must be human.

I know what men and women are and I feel male. Again, I'm not sure, except female doesn't feel right to me.

And I can't be a child because I know that this is not how a child would think. As a child I might just accept these conditions as natural and cope with them. I would be defining the sanity and insanity of my universe-, as if newly implanted into a protecting womb.

I am an adult human male.

So far, so good. But there must be something else. I must have some kind of background, if only I could penetrate this wall of blankness about me and see it.

But I can't. I can't remember. What's worse is that there's not even any sensation of thoughts just out of reach. Nothing! It's as if I were trying to peer through a dark window into a room, and the room were empty. As if I didn't exist before the first pain. The key is there somewhere, if only I can keep awake long enough. I've got to . . .

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God, I was out for a long time. But this was different. I wasn't totally out of it. This time I dreamed! I was bleeding to death as my blood poured into a bottomless pail. The doctors were standing around applauding as my blood poured out. With each pint of blood I lost, a loud cheer went up. The doctors were enjoying my death. It was as if my death meant their life

Why do I have these thoughts about the people who must have saved my life?

It doesn't matter. What does count is that I did dream, and I seem to be progressing. For the first time since I became conscious, it is easier to identify the places I have no feeling than the ones in which I do have feeling.

My right leg is still not there, as far as I can tell. Except for the toes, I might think that the leg was missing altogether. I can feel the toes, though, so the leg must only be badly damaged.

My abdomen is numb from my hips to my armpits. There is the sensation of pressure and heat of some kind, but not real feeling like the rest of me.

That's it!

The rest of me has feeling. I can't see, hear, or speak. I can't move any muscles. But they're there, and I'm sure that it's just a matter of time until I'm whole.

I must remain sane.

The doctors must be doing their part. After all, from a feeling of nothingness I have come together, piece by piece. I must have been a real wreck, but they've put me back together.

Back together? (It's as if they've assembled me! Somewhere (Where? Where am I getting any of these thoughts?) I remember accounts of people awakening from serious accidents. There was numbness, sometimes a searing pain, and hallucinations. They remembered the accident, their childhood, or something they had read. Me? I remember nothing. If I existed before, then I should know something about myself except for assorted aches and pains. But I know nothing. Not only that but somehow I know there is nothing to know. I can pull up words and a few mechanical concepts, but there are no experiences upon which I can build myself. There is only one way that could be. I did not exist before!

I am being created.

The doctors aren't making me whole; they're simply making me. Rather than Florence Nightingale's progeny, trying to save a life, they're the moral descendents of Dr. Frankenstein, trying to create it. I'm, a man-made monster, an experiment. That's my sensation has returned, piece by piece. They've been putting me together. I can remember no name because I have none. It's got to be true.

Should I be angry? Should I play the part of Dr. Frankenstein's monster, and turn on my creators, and try to destroy them? That's what they'll be expecting. A mindless body driven by confusion and fear.

But they've done their job well.

I am what they made me: not a frightened, insane creature. I'm a rational animal. What difference does it make who my creator is, God or Man. I'm alive and sentient. That's what counts.

When I awake, I must act carefully. I must display my intelligence without arousing any fear in them. If I am good at it, then my life can be a success. Even if I am bedridden, I can do something. Life, even if artificially created, is still life and is better than death.

Who knows?

I might live much longer than others. When I finally die, I will still have many memories and experiences within me to carry into whatever afterlife exists.

It's fading again, but slower than before. Does that mean that I am becoming fully aware?

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Alive again!

God, I hate those periods of unconsciousness. I go completely blank, just like the eternity before they turned me on. In a way it's funny. I wrestled with the details of my "accident" for so long. Now, when I finally guess the truth of my existence, the facts fall into place so neatly that no doubt remains. I am a new creature.

My senses are much more strongly present today, particularly those in my head. I can almost see light with my eyes or hear sounds with my ears.

The excitement is almost too much. If something doesn't happen today or tomorrow, then I shall go insane. My mind is more unstable than I thought. It doesn't dream or hallucinate. It seems to gnaw at itself. A part of it wants to go back to being blank.

It's suicidal.

It doesn't want to admit that there is life for me. Luckily, this rational side is stronger. It's growing stronger and more and ..

That was a shadow!

I saw something move across my field of vision! And there are sounds. Before seeing the shadows, those sounds seemed like my own thoughts. But, when played against the movement of the ghosts before my eyes, it is clear that they are external.

I've got to listen.

Yes, the sounds and sights are growing stronger. .

"retract . . . tube . . . horace . . ."

Words! I could recognize words!

The shadows are no more. They must have covered my eyes with something, but I can hear better. The voices are indistinct but hover on the edge of being

recognizable. I think that at least one is a man. I can't tell for sure about the other one. There are only two, though. I'm sure.

"Be careful with them ... into ... cold ..." "... know my job ... lost any parts ..."
"There's a first for everything."

A real conversation.! When I first awoke, I thought that I would never hear another conversation in my life. God, my mind is confused. I want to listen and think, but I can't.

"What else do we have to do?"

"Nothing that I can think of but we had better go over the list one more time carefully. If we make a mistake and leave something out we will be in for it."

"Yeah. Don't forget to monitor the neural responses this time. We need an 'after' reading for the dossier."

It can't be. They talk as if the experiment were over! Could I be that close to being awake? I must be drugged. That is why my mind is such a blank. When they stop pumping me full of the drug, everything will come into focus.

"Hey, Jonathan;, come here. I've got an activity pattern on the alpha channel. It can't be. This John Doe is dead."

"Damn, I've heard of this before, but I have never seen it."

"What is it? Did the doctors make a mistake? Have we been cutting up a live one?"

"No. No. Sometimes you get these phantom signals. Especially since they started using low voltage currents to keep the body in tone during dissection."

NO! I AM ALIVE!

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly. You saw his charts. You examined him five days ago. He was fully and completely dead. No brain wave. No heartbeat. He hasn't started to decompose only because of the life support systems that have kept the cellular tissue going."

NO. NO. LISTEN TO ME. I CAN HEAR YOU.

"This gives me the creeps. All this just to collect a few organs."

"Not just a 'few organs,' if you please. We've collected spare parts from testicles to cornea. We even got bone marrow samples from his leg for the cancer research fellows. Hell, this one's been a good one!"

STOP IT! IT'S A JOKE. DON'T KID ME.

"Okay, okay. But did we have to send all of that juice into the brain and spine? He kept twitching. Moving as if he were reaching for me."

"I know, that was sort of weird. But we needed the spinal tissue, and that was the only way."

"We're finished now, right? I can pull the plug?"

"Yeah, as soon as I get a final alpha reading. This is the strongest response I've ever seen in a cadaver."

LISTEN! IT'S STRONG BECAUSE I'M ALIVE. LOOK AT THE WAVES! I AM SPEAKING TO YOU!

"Okay, I'm done. Turn him off" STOP, WON'T YO . . .

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The End