

If I Die Before I Wake by Emily Koch

5 stars

Stuck in a body being unable to communicate.

Alex, lying in bed with a tracheotomy helping him to breathe and a pipe going into his stomach to feed him, has woken up after a long spell of being comatose. He is disoriented and cannot understand how or why or even where he is and it takes some time for him to realise that he is in a hospital bed connected to all these pipes because; "Alex Jackson, twenty-seven, is believed to have fallen twenty metres when he was out climbing with friends on Saturday morning". What is not clear for him at the beginning of this "awakening" is that he can understand everything that is going on around him, but unfortunately, he cannot communicate. Nothing works; he tries to open his eyes, but even these will not respond to the command he's sending them.

How did this super-fit young man with his whole life ahead of him land up in this situation? He hears the police come in and discuss his case with the doctors and nurses so realises that it was not an accident, but something quite more sinister. He was pushed off the ledge just as he reached what should have been that last minute of triumph.

The doctors consider Alex to be in a vegetative state and so nobody realises that he can hear what is being said in front of him and it is this that sets him off on the task, using his journalistic training to work out who wants him dead and more importantly, why they want him dead.

Visualise being an individual with locked-in syndrome. fully alert and aware of your environment. trying to ascertain who it is who wants you dead.. Could it be your angry girlfriend who has discovered "that letter" you thought you had hidden away so carefully? Or your climbing buddy, Eleanor, who thinks that because you are unconscious, that she can use the opportunity to confess that she had a crush on you. Or is it someone from your past? Or someone who didn't like what you'd written about them in an article for the newspaper you worked for? However, you know that the only two people who you can really trust are your father and sister, Philippa, who no matter how hard you try, cannot understand that you are very much aware of your surroundings and while trying to work out who tried to kill you, hear them discussing turning off all means of support if you contract pneumonia again.

One of the cleverest book storylines ever! I had to read way into the night because I knew there was no way that I could sleep until I had reached the last words that come in the brilliant explosive finale.

Treebeard

Breakaway Reviewers received a copy of the book to review.