

Vertigo

Shane Wilton

Barrelling towards the precipice before me, I hurl myself forward, anxious to escape this twisted prison once and for all. I feel my body race closer and closer to the earth below, until, mere inches from being splattered against it, my eyes jolt open and I glance around, beads of sweat forming all over me. It was only a dream; every goddamned night it's only a dream.

Who would I be this time? I've worn so many faces that I've lost track of it all. Last time I was an accountant, the time before that a clown, hell, once I was a bagpiper. I'm not even Scottish. Or at least, I don't think I am. I try to gain my bearings. That's always the hardest part. You'd think you'd get used to it, waking up in a new place, in a new body, every single night, but you don't. I doubt I ever will.

I'm in a bed. That's good. It's always problematic waking up homeless; people just think you're crazy. Not that they won't eventually anyway, but at least this way they won't realize it at first. One time, I remember being thrown into a poorhouse. They kept us all under such good watch that it took me months to wake up. I ended up falling into a grinder. By the time they pulled me out, I'd already woken as a middle-aged Chinese woman. That was a first.

Sometimes I wonder how many people don't realize they're dreaming. I can't possibly be the only one? I've met a few people, lucid dreamers they call themselves, but they have it all backwards. Why would you want to escape into a dream, when you're already trapped in one? Not that it matters, they're just characters in my own dream anyway: nameless actors with no memory of what was or will be. It's reached the point where I don't know what to expect when I finally do wake up: I mean, really wake up, not this hell I've been forced to endure.

Part of me wonders whether I should just give up, find a nice dream, and stay there. It's tempting - there have been some great dreams: I've been a Montenegrin prince twice now. The second

time was fun. The first? I was killed in my sleep. I can't let those thoughts get in the way of my goal though. One day I'll wake up, and when I do, I'll finally be happy. I know it.

It looks like I'm in an apartment building. Rooftops are convenient. I'm always amazed at how difficult it can be to wake yourself up; sometimes it just takes a pinch - not this time though. Usually I end up needing to try something drastic: jumping in front of a subway, or hurling myself off of a building. Nothing jolts you awake quicker than plummeting to your death. Climbing through the roof-access hatch, I briefly remark that the lights in the stairwell were flickering. I'm not used to that: it's somehow unnerving.

It's strange, after everything I've been through, I still always feel nauseous at times like this. Maybe I'm scared of heights. It kind of adds a sick twist to exposure therapy, doesn't it? If anything, it does make me wonder what else I'm like; I've been asleep for so long that I can't even remember whether I have a family. There was a woman asleep beside me when I woke up this morning. She looked so serene; I didn't want to wake her. Soon enough this entire world will vanish into my psyche anyway. I doubt I'll even remember her, come morning.

I take a running start at the edge, barreling towards the precipice before me, and hurl myself forward, anxious to escape this twisted prison once and for all. I feel my body race closer and closer to the earth below, and brace myself for the coming awakening. Splat.