**Battlements Ascending by Kieron Tufft**

The pulse from the earth sends his form upwards, from cobbled stones into the air. His eyes are opening, the moisture of the fall being wiped away by the polarized ascent. Legs walking in mid air, running backwards up the side of the Old and Mighty Stone Tower.

There before he began, there long after he ends.

The air whips in a reversed howl past his ears, the kneecaps, shattered by a pre landing collision, knit themselves into place. The adrenaline is sinking in slow increments, finding its way back into the brain and calming the heart, beat by precious beat. The relief of a second chance has sunk in and in his calming mind he wanders at reasons for taking a tumble off the battlements.

He passes the window on the left hand side. Descending, he thought he caught a glimpse of the pale skin of a sleeping woman, naked in her bed and oblivious. As he comes past the window he stops his ascent and peers in, frozen in position like a skydiver, splayed out shooting like a star in mid air. He sees her creamy skin and long auburn hair. He sees a thickset arm warped around her. A picture of her and a man stands on her bedside table. He is broad. She is beautiful. He takes note of her steady breathing and rises with every exhalation.

He blinks, like taking a photo in his mind with sepia tones. Skin like cream and hair like fire. He pushes upwards.

Window two is a big man. He is cooking bacon in a pan. He is chiselled. He is lean. The man in the picture on the bedside table. The man jumped out of the picture frame and into the kitchen. The man jumped off the balcony and onto the cobbles.

Window three. A beautifully angry woman is packing a suitcase. Eyes on fire and hair blazing with them. The man is there, standing over a broken lamp. Splintered bulbs like split driftwood. The woman with eyes red and flushed skin stomps around the room. Mouths moving like machines. Words without thought or conscious concoction being spat towards each other. The man is shaking but unable to move. His shaky voice defends his daring encounters with the seductive skill that didn’t belong to her. Falling man remembers every word she said and every lie he told.

He rotates round the tower, ninety degrees round to the next window. A curved and gentle arch frames not so gentle men, not so gently tearing possessions from a room. The man is in the corner crying. Falling man remembers this being the moment, the precise moment, that thoughts of cobbled falls and Old and Mighty towers came to be.

Man naked in window five. He remembers the windows in Amsterdam with seductively skilled ladies sat like him. Coitally conditioned ladies don’t drink bottles of whiskey, they tempted and beckoned. He is not trying to tempt, he is trying to remember.

A remembering man in window six. No more chiselled chest for him. He thinks of a beautiful figure against his once muscular frame. He mourns seductively skilled ladies seductively taking his money and seductively ending all things.

A desperate man in window seven thinks on six figure salaries in a two figure bed and breakfast. Three figure nights against the forms of sour smelling women. Creamy skinned. Not smooth cream. Lumpy cream. Sour cream. Rotten breath and missing teeth. Cackles instead of laughs. They give him money, he gives them what’s left of his own carnal repertoire. He giggles at the ridiculousness of how it came to be.

The Giggling Gigolo talks to a shadow in an ally. Brown powder and rusted needles help him ponder his failures. Failure reeks like burnt spoons and rubber tubes.

The top is in sight. The ascent starts to slow so he fills his mind to the finish line. Smooth skin. Burning auburn. A surging, musical laugh. He goes higher. The cobbles fall away. Feet touch the edge and hands grasp the limestone pillar beside him. He looks down for a second time and blesses his second chance.

Lithe woman is running. She surges up the stairs towards where he stands poised. The sun is rising. Memories are dawning. The hunger is fading. The fire smells of vanilla and flowers. Remembering used to smell of expensive aftershave and crunch Michelin Stars. Now he smells like dirty skin and un-brushed teeth.

Remembering man remembers to step off the ledge onto a platform. He knows how she likes to hold his hand. He blesses how she likes to talk all the time, even when walking up a big hill. Or down a large flight of tower stairs. He knows her name. He talks to her about the film they are going to go and see tomorrow. He knows she isn’t really there. The Giggling Gigolo who Happily Hallucinates.

He feels the cobbles on his feet, not his face. He glances up. He walks away. A man sized boy in his man sized shoes.