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Wiped Out

by Richard Lewis

Cameron woke to the sound of rain pelting the window from above and the impatient rumble of rush hour, rising from the streets below. He was parched, his mouth dry as powdered bone. The fusty smell of the Brooklyn hotel room filled his nostrils and he was becoming aware that he was not alone.

Slowly turning over, the first thing he noticed was a 3D image emblazoned on her shoulder, of steps rising to an open door, leading out into darkness, where Saturn and its rings hung in the night sky. 'A strange choice of tattoo for a woman,' Cameron thought.

Reality was starting to bite. The girl lay still as a tombstone. Her blue eyes staring blindly at the ceiling, lips parted, as if frozen, whispering a final word. He checked for a pulse, though knowing there would be none and saw the pale bruises on her neck.

'My god! What have I done?' he thought, trying to haul his mind back through the corridors of the previous night. As if by sheer will, he could force his memory to comply and reveal the grim truth. But entry was barred, his recall drowned in a vat of Budweiser and Brandy Alexanders.

A mounting dread was rising inside. Cameron's heart pounded in his chest, he was finding it hard to breathe and started to shake. 'I've done bad things but could never have done this,' he told himself, yet the evidence was staring him in the face. He'd had blackouts before after excessive bouts of drinking. Twice charged for assault after bar-room brawls, dissociating, his memory wiped, he'd pledged to curb the drinking. He'd told himself, never again.

Cameron's world had been a catalogue of wrong turns and bad choices. The bitter taste of regret accompanying him along life's unforgiving highway.

Due to his criminal record he usually gave a false name when checking in to a hotel but after all the alcohol, he couldn't remember. 'Did I tell anyone my name or didn't I tell anyone my name?'

Glancing at his watch, the minute hand was warning him. Ten thirty! Check out was eleven o'clock, they'd need access to the room. He went through his options, none of them good. It all hung on whether or not he'd given his real name at the desk. 'How can I get hold of that register?' He wondered. But there was no time, cleaning staff would soon be knocking at the door.

The only thing Cameron could think of to buy himself time was to hide the girl. He tried to fit her into the wardrobe but the body having stiffened, resisted, so he slid her under the bed in the vain hope she would not be noticed.

Down in the lobby he waited for the desk clerk to go into the back room and opened the register. He peered through the long list of names but before he could finish checking, the clerk returned, asking, "can I help you sir?"