

A BEDROOM IN THE WEE HOURS OF THE MORNING

Coming here had been a mistake, and Lottie Kilgallon didn't like to admit her mistakes.

And I won't admit this one, she thought with determination as she stared up at the ceiling that glimmered overhead

Her husband of 10 days slumbered beside her. Sleeping the sleep of the just was how some might have put it. Others, more honest, might have called it the sleep of the monumentally stupid. He was William Pillsbury of the Westchester Pillsburys, only son and heir of Harold M. Pillsbury, old and comfortable money. Publishing was what they liked to talk about because publishing was a gentleman's profession, but there was also a chain of New England textile mills, a foundry in Ohio, and extensive agricultural holdings in the South - cotton and citrus and fruit. Old money was always better than nouveau riche, but either way they had money falling out of their assholes. If she ever said that aloud to Bill, he would undoubtedly go pale and might even faint dead away. No fear, Bill. Profanation of the Pillsbury family shall never cross my lips.

It had been her idea to honeymoon at the Overlook in Colorado, and there had been two reasons for this. First, although it was tremendously expensive (as the best resorts were), it was not a "hep" place to go, and Lottie did not like to go to the hep places. Where did you go on your honeymoon. Lottie? Oh, this perfectly, wonderful resort hotel in Colorado - the Overlook. Lovely place. Quite out of the way but so romantic. And her friends - whose stupidity was exceeded in most cases only by that of William Pillsbury - himself - would look at her in dumb - literally! - wonder. Lottie had done it again.

Her second reason had been of more personal importance. She had wanted to honeymoon at the Overlook because Bill wanted to go to Rome. It was imperative to find out certain things as soon as possible. Would she be able to have her own way immediately? And if not, how long would it take to grind him down? He was stupid, and he had followed her around like a dog with its tongue hanging out since her debutante ball, but would he be as malleable after the ring was slipped on as he had been before?

Lottie smiled a little in the dark despite her lack of sleep and the bad dreams she had had since they arrived here. Arrived here, that was the key phrase. "Here" was not the American Hotel in Rome but the Overlook in Colorado. She was going to be able to manage him just fine, and that was the important thing. She would only make him stay another four days (she had originally planned on three weeks, but the bad dreams had changed that), and then they could go back to New York. After all, that was where the action was in this August of 1929. The stock market was going crazy, the sky was the limit, and Lottie expected to be an heiress to multimillions instead of just one or two million by this time next year. Of course there were some weak sisters who claimed the market was riding for a fall, but no one had ever called Lottie Kilgallon a weak sister.

Lottie Kilgallon. Pillsbury now at least that's the way I'll have to sign my checks, of course. But inside I'll always be Lottie Kilgallon. Because he's never going to touch me. Not inside where it counts.

The most tiresome thing about this first contest of her marriage was that Bill actually liked the Overlook. He was up even, day at two minutes past the crack of dawn, disturbing what ragged bits of sleep she had managed after the restless nights, staring eagerly out at the sunrise like some sort of disgusting Greek nature boy. He had been hiking two or three times, he had gone on several nature rides with other guests, and bored her almost to the point of screaming with stories about the horse he rode on these jaunts, a bay mare named Tessie. He had tried to get her to go on these outings with him, but Lottie refused. Riding meant slacks, and her posterior was just a trifle too-wide for slacks. The idiot had also suggested that she go hiking with him and some of the others - the caretaker's son doubled as a guide, Bill enthused, and he knew a hundred trails. The amount of game you saw, Bill said, would make you think it was 1829, instead of a hundred years later. Lottie had dumped cold water on this idea too.

"I believe, darling, that all hikes should be one-way, you see."

"One-way?" His wide Anglo-Saxon brow crippled and crogged into its usual expression of befuddlement. "How can you have a one-way hike, Lottie?"

"By hailing a taxi to take you home when your feet begin to hurt," she replied coldly,

The barb was wasted. He went without her, and came back glowing. The stupid bastard was getting a tan.

She had not even enjoyed their evenings of bridge in the downstairs recreation room, and that was most unlike her. She was something of a barracuda at bridge, and if it had been ladylike to play for stakes in mixed company, she could have brought a cash dowry to her marriage (not that she would have, of course). Bill was a good bridge partner, too; he had both qualifications: He understood the basic rules and he allowed Lottie to dominate him. She thought it was poetic justice that her new husband spent most of their bridge evenings as the dummy.

Their partners at the Overlook were the Compsons occasionally, the Vereckers more frequently. Dr. Verecker was in his early 70s, a surgeon who had retired after a near-fatal heart attack. His wife smiled a lot, spoke softly, and had eyes like shiny nickels. They played only adequate bridge, but they kept beating Lottie and Bill. On the occasions when the men played against the women, the men ended up trouncing Lottie and Malvina Verecker. When Lottie and Dr. Verecker played Bill and Malvina, she and the doctor usually won, but there was no pleasure in it because Bill was a dullard and Malvina, could not see the game of bridge as anything but a social tool.

Two nights before, after the doctor and his wife had made a bid of four clubs that, they had absolutely no right to make, Lottie had mused the cards in a sudden flash of pique that was very unlike her. She usually kept her feelings under much better control.

"You could have led into my spades on that third trick!" she rattled at Bill. "That would have put a stop to it right there!"

"But dear," said Bill, flustered, "I thought you were thin in spades."

"If I had been thin in spades, I shouldn't have bid two of them, should I? Why I continue to play this game with you I don't. know!"

The Vereckers blinked at them in mild surprise. Later that evening Mrs. Verecker, she of the nickel-bright eyes, would tell her husband that she had thought them such a nice couple, so loving, but when she rumped the cards like that she had looked just like a shrew.

Bill was staring at her with jaws agape.

"I'm very sorry," said Lottie, gathering up the reins of her control and giving them an inward shake. "I'm off my feed a little, I suppose. I haven't been sleeping well."

"That's a pity," said the doctor. "Usually this mountain air—we're almost 12,000 feet above sea level, you know is very conducive to good rest. Less oxygen, you know. The body doesn't—"

"I've had bad dreams," Lottie told him shortly.

And so she had. Not just bad dreams but nightmares. She had never been much of one to dream (which said something disgusting and Freudian about, her psyche, no doubt), even as a child. Oh, yes, there had been some pretty humdrum affairs, mostly he only one she could remember that, came even close to being a nightmare was one in which she had been delivering a Good Citizenship speech at the school assembly and had looked down to discover she had forgotten to put on her dress. Later someone had told her almost everyone had a dream like that at some point or another.

The dreams she had had at the Overlook were much worse. It was not a case of one dream or two repeating themselves with variations; they were all different. Only the setting of each was similar: In each one she found herself in a different part of the Overlook Hotel. Each dream would begin with an awareness on her part that she was dreaming and that something terrible and frightening was going to happen to her in the course of the dream. There was an inevitability about it that was particularly awful.

In one of them she had been hurrying for the elevator because she was late for dinner, so late that Bill had already gone down before her in a temper.

She rang for the elevator, which came promptly and was empty except for the operator. She thought too late that it was odd; at mealtimes you could barely wedge yourself in. The stupid hotel was only half full, but the elevator had a ridiculously small capacity. Her unease heightened as the elevator descended and continued to descend ... for far too long a time. Surely they must have reached the lobby or even the basement by now, and still the operator did not open the doors, and still the sensation of downward motion continued. She tapped him on the shoulder with mixed feelings of indignation and panic, aware too late of how spongy he felt, how strange, like a scarecrow stuffed with rotten straw. And as he turned his head and grinned at her she saw that the elevator was being piloted by a dead man, his face a greenish-white corpselike hue, Ms eyes sunken, his hair under his cap lifeless and sere. The fingers wrapped around the switch were fallen away to bones.

Even as she filled her lungs to shriek, the corpse threw the switch over and uttered, "Your floor, madam," in a husky, empty voice. The door drew open to reveal flames and basalt plateaus and the stench of brimstone. The elevator operator had taken her to hell.

In another dream it was near the end of the afternoon and she was on the playground. The light was curiously golden, although the sky overhead was black with thunderheads. Membranes of shower danced between two of the saw-toothed peaks further west. It was like a Brueghel, a moment of sunshine and low pressure. And she felt something beside her. Moving. Something in the topiary. And she turned to see with frozen horror that it was the topiary: The hedge animals had left their places and were creeping toward her, the

lions, the buffalo, even the rabbit that usually looked so comic and friendly. Their horrid hedge features were bent on her as they moved slowly toward the playground on their hedge paws, green and silent and deadly under the black thunderheads.

In the one she had just awakened from, the hotel had been on fire. She had awakened in their room to find Bill gone and smoke drifting slowly through the apartment. She fled in her nightgown but lost her direction in the narrow halls, which were obscured by smoke. All the numbers seemed to be gone from the doors, and there was no way to tell if you were running toward the stairwell and elevator or away from them. She rounded a corner and saw Bill standing outside the window at the end, motioning her forward. Somehow she had run all the way to the back of the hotel; he was standing out there on the fire escape landing. Now there was heat baking into her back through the thin, filmy stuff of her nightgown. The place must be in flames behind her, she thought. Perhaps it had been the boiler. You had to keep an eye on the boiler, because if you didn't, she would creep on you. Lottie started forward and suddenly something wrapped around her arm like a python, holding her back. It was one of the fire hoses she had seen along the corridor walls, white canvas hose in a bright red frame. It had come alive somehow, and it writhed and coiled around her, now securing a leg, now her other arm. She was held fast and it was getting hotter, hotter. She could hear the angry crackle of the flames now only feet behind her. The wallpaper was peeling and blistering. Bill was gone from the fire-escape landing. And then she had been-

She had been awake in the big double bed, no smell of smoke, with Bill Pillsbury sleeping the sleep of the justly stupid beside her. She was running sweat, and if it weren't so late she would get up to shower. It was quarter past three in the morning.

Dr. Verecker had offered to give her a sleeping medicine, but Lottie had refused. She distrusted any concoction you put in your body to knock out your mind. It was like giving up command of your ship voluntarily, and she had sworn to herself that she would never do that.

But what would she do for the next four clays? Well, Verecker played shuffleboard in the mornings with his nicked wife. Perhaps she would look him up and get the prescription after all.

Lottie looked up at the white ceiling high above her, glimmering ghostlike, and admitted again that the Overlook had been a very bad mistake. None of the ads for the Overlook in the *New Yorker* or *The American Mercury* mentioned that the place's real specialty seemed to be giving people the whims. Four more days, and that was plenty. It had been a mistake, all right, but a mistake she would never admit, or have to admit. In fact, she was sure she could.

You had to keep an eye on the boiler, because if you didn't, she would creep up on you. What did that mean, anyway? Or was it just one of those nonsensical things that sometimes came to you in dreams, so much gibberish? Of course, there was undoubtedly a boiler in the basement or somewhere to heat the place; even summer resorts had to have heat, sometimes, didn't they? If only to supply hot water. But creep? Would a boiler creep?

You had to keep an eye on, the boiler.

It was like one of those crazy riddles:

Why is a mouse when it runs, when is a raven like a writing desk, what is a creeping boiler? Was it, like the hedges, maybe? She'd had a dream where the hedges crept. And the fire hose that had what - what? - slithered?

A chill touched her. It was not good to think much about the dreams in the night, in the dark. You could ... well, you could bother yourself. It was better to think about the things you would be doing when you got back to New York, about how you were going to convince Bill that a baby was a bad idea for a while, until he got firmly settled in the vice presidency his father had awarded him as a wedding present-

She'll creep on you.

- and how you were going to encourage him to bring his work home so he would get used to the idea that she was going to be involved with it, very much involved.

Or did the whole hotel, creep? Was that the answer?

I'll make him a good wife, Lottie thought frantically. We'll work at it the same way we always worked at being bridge partners. He knows the rules of the game and he knows enough to let me run him. It will be just like the bridge, just like that, and if we've been off our game up here that, doesn't mean anything, it's just the hotel, the dreams-

An affirming voice: That's it. The whole place. It... creeps.

"Oh, shit," Lottie Kilgallon whispered in the dark. It was dismaying for her to realize just how badly her nerves were shot. As on the other nights, there would be no more sleep for her now. She would lie here in bed until the sun started to come up and then she would get an uneasy hour or so.

Smoking in bed was a bad habit, a terrible habit., but she had begun to leave her cigarettes in an ashtray on the floor by the bed in case of the dreams. Sometimes it calmed her. She reached down to get the ashtray and the thought burst on her like a revelation:

It does creep, the whole place - like it's alive!

And that was when the hand reached out unseen from under the bed and gripped her wrist firmly ... almost lecherously. A fingerlike canvas scratched suggestively against her palm and something was under there, something had been under there the whole time, and Lottie began to scream. She screamed until her throat was raw and hoarse and her eyes were bulging from her face and Bill was awake and pallid with terror beside her.

When he put on the lamp she leaped from the bed, retreated into the farthest corner of the room and curled up with her thumb in her mouth.

Both Bill and Dr. Verecker tried to find out what was wrong; she told them but she was still sucking her thumb, so it was some time before they realized she was saying, "It crept under the bed. It crept under the bed."

And even though they flipped up the coverlet and Bill actually lifted up the whole bed by its foot off the floor to show her there was nothing under there, not even a litter of dust kitties, she would not come out of the corner. When the sun came up, she did at last come out of the corner. She took her thumb out of her mouth. She stayed away from the bed. She stared at, Bill Pillsbury from her clown-white face.

"We're going back to New York," she said. "This morning."

"Of course," Bill muttered. "Of course, dear."

Bill Pillsbury's father died of a heart attack two weeks after the stock-market crash. Bill and Lottie could not keep the company's head above water. Things went from bad to worse. In the years that followed she thought often of their honeymoon at the Overlook Hotel, and the dreams, and the canvas hand that had crept out from under the bed to squeeze her own. She thought about those things more and more. She committed suicide in a Yonkers motel room in 1949, a woman who was prematurely gray and prematurely lined. It had been 20 years and the hand that had gripped her wrist when she reached down to get her cigarettes had never really let go. She left a one-sentence suicide note written on Holiday Inn stationery. The note said: "I wish we had gone to Rome."

AND NOW THIS WORD FROM NEW HAMPSHIRE

In that long, hot summer of 1953, the summer Jacky Torrance turned 6, his father came home one night from the hospital and broke Jacky's arm. He almost killed the boy. He was drunk.

Jacky was sitting on the front porch reading a Combat Casey comic book when his father came down the street, listing to one side, torpedoed by beer somewhere down the line. As he always did, the boy felt a mixture of love-hate-fear rise in his chest at the sight of the old man, who looked like a giant, malevolent ghost in his hospital whites. Jacky's father was an orderly at the Berlin Community Hospital. He was like God, like Nature-sometimes lovable, sometimes terrible. You never knew which it would be. Jacky's mother feared and served him. Jacky's brothers hated him. Only Jacky, of all of them, still loved him in spite of the fear and the hate, and sometimes the volatile mixture of emotions made him want to cry out at the sight of his father coming, to simply cry out: "I love you, Daddy! Go away! Hug me! I'll kill you! I'm so afraid of you! I need you!" And his father seemed to sense in his stupid way-he was a stupid man, and selfish - that all of them had gone beyond him but Jacky, the youngest, knew that the only way he could touch the others was to bludgeon them to attention. But with Jacky there was still love, and there had been times when he had cuffed the boy's mouth into running blood and then hugged him with a frightful force, the killing force just, barely held back by some other thing, and Jackie would let himself be hugged deep into the atmosphere of malt and hops that hung around his old man forever, quailing, loving, fearing.

He leaped off the step and ran halfway down the path before something stopped him.

"Daddy?" he said. "Where's the car?"

Torrance came toward him, and Jacky saw how very drunk he was. "Wrecked it up," he said thickly.

"Oh..." Careful now. Careful what you say. For your life, be careful. "That's too bad"

His father stopped and regarded Jacky from his stupid pig eyes. Jacky held his breath. Somewhere behind his father's brow, under the lawn-mowed brush of his crew cut, the scales were turning. The hot, afternoon stood still while Jacky waited, staring up anxiously into his father's face to see if his father would throw a rough bear arm around his shoulder, grinding Jacky's cheek against the rough, cracked leather of the belt that held up his white pants and say, "Walk with me into the house, big boy." in the hard and contemptuous way that was the only way he could even approach love without destroying himself - or if it would be something else.

Tonight it was something else.

The thunderheads appeared on his father's brow. "What do you mean, 'That's too bad'? What kind of shit is that?"

"Just...too bad, Daddy. That's all I meant. it's-"

Torrance's hand swept out at the end of his arm, huge hand, hamhock arm, but speedy, yes, very speedy, and Jacky went down with church bells in his head and a split lip.

"Shutup" his father said, giving it a broad A.

Jacky said nothing. Nothing would do any good now. The balance had swung the wrong way.

"You ain't gonna sass me," said Torrance. "You won't sass your daddy. Get up here and take your medicine."

There was something in his face this time, some dark and blazing thing. And Jacky suddenly knew that this time there might be no hug at the end of the blows, and if there was he might, be unconscious and unknowing ... maybe even dead.

He ran.

Behind him, his father let out a bellow of rage and chased him., a flapping specter in hospital whites, a juggernaut of doom following his son from the front yard to the back.

Jacky ran for his life. The tree house, he was thinking. He can't get up there; the ladder nailed to the tree won't hold him. I'll get up there, talk to him; maybe he'll go to sleep - Oh, God, please let him go to sleep - he was weeping in terror as he ran.

"Come back here, goddammit!" His father was roaring behind him. "Come back here and take your medicine! Take it like a man!"

Jacky flashed past the back steps. His mother, that thin and defeated woman, scrawny in a faded housedress, had come out through the screen door from the kitchen, just as Jacky ran past with his father in pursuit. She opened her mouth as if to speak or cry out, but her hand came up in a fist and stopped whatever she might have said, kept it safely behind her teeth. She was afraid for her son, but more afraid that her husband would turn on her.

"No, you don't! Come back here!"

Jacky reached the large elm in the backyard, the elm where last year his father had smoke-drugged a colony of wasps then burned their nest with gasoline. The boy went up the haphazardly hung nailed-on rungs like greased lightning, and still he was nearly not fast enough. His father's clutching, enraged hand grasped the boy's ankle in a grip like flexed steel, then slipped a little and succeeded only in pulling off Jacky's loafer. Jacky went up the last, three rungs and crouched on the floor of the tree house, 12 feet above the ground, panting and crying on his hands and knees.

His father seemed to go crazy. He danced around the tree like an Indian, Bellowing his rage. He slammed his fists into the tree, making bark fly and bringing lattices of blood to his knuckles. He kicked it. His huge moon face was white with frustration and red with anger.

"Please, Daddy," Jacky moaned. "Whatever I said ... I'm sorry I said it..."

"Come down! You come down out of there take your fucking medicine, you little cur! Right now!"

"I Will ... I will If you promise not to ... to hit me too hard ... not hurt me... just spank me but not hurt me..."

"Get out of that tree!" his father screamed.

Jacky looked toward the house but that was hopeless. His mother had retreated somewhere far away, to neutral ground.

"GET OUT RIGHT NOW!"

"Oh, Daddy, I don't dare!" Jacky cried out, and that was the truth. Because now his father might kill him.

There was a period of stalemate. A minute, perhaps, or perhaps two. His father circled the tree, puffing and blowing like a whale. Jacky turned around and around on his hands and knees, following the movements. They were like parts of a visible clock.

The second or third time he came back to the ladder nailed to the tree, Torrance stopped. He looked speculatively at the ladder. And laid his hands on the rung before his eyes. He began to climb.

"No, Daddy, it won't hold you," Jacky whispered.

But his father came on relentlessly, like fate, like death, like doom. Up and up, closer to the tree house. One rung snapped off under his hands and he almost fell but caught the next one with a grunt and a lunge. Another one of the rungs twisted around from the horizontal to the perpendicular under his weight with a rasping scream of pulling nails, but it did not give way, and then the working, congested face was visible over the edge of the tree-house floor, and for that one moment of his childhood Jack Torrance had his father at bay; if he could have kicked that face with the foot that still wore its loafer, kicked it where the nose terminated between the piggy eyes, he could have driven his father backward off the ladder, perhaps killed him (If he had killed him, would anyone have said anything but Thanks, Jacky"?) But it was love that stopped him, and love that, let him just his face in his hands and give up as first one of his father's pudgy, short-fingered hands appeared on the boards and then the other.

"Now, by God," his father breathed. He stood above his huddled son like a giant.

"Oh, Daddy," Jacky mourned for both of them. And for a moment his father paused, his face sagged into lines of uncertainty, and Jacky felt a thread of hope.

Then the face drew up. Jacky could smell the beer, and his father said, "I'll teach you to sass me," and all hope was gone as the foot swung out, burying itself in Jacky's belly, driving the wind from his belly in a whoosh. as he flew from the tree-house platform and fell to the ground, turning over once and landing on the point of his left elbow, which snapped with a greenstick crack. He didn't even have breath enough to scream. The last thing he saw before he blacked out was his father's face, which seemed to be at the end of a long, dark tunnel. It, seemed to be filling with surprise, the way a vessel may fill with some pale liquid.

He's just starting to know what he did, Jacky thought incoherently.

And on the heels of that, a thought with no meaning at all, coherent or otherwise, a thought, that chased him into the blackness as he fell back on the chewed and tattered grass of the back lawn in a faint:

What you see is what you'll be, what YOU see is what you'll be, what you-

The break in his arm was cleanly healed in six months. The nightmares went, on much longer. In a way, they never stopped.

THE OVERLOOK HOTEL, THIRD FLOOR, 1958

The murderers came up the stairs in their stocking feet.

The two men posted outside the door of the Presidential Suite never heard them. They were young, dressed in Ivy League suits with the cut of the jackets a little wider than the fashion of the day decreed. You couldn't wear a .357 Magnum concealed in a shoulder holster and be quite in fashion. They were discussing whether or not the Yankees could take yet another pennant. It was lacking two days of September, and as usual, the pinstripers looked formidable. Just talking about the Yankees made them feel a little better. They were New York boys, on loan from Walt Abruzzi, and they were a long way from home.

The man inside was a big wheel in the Organization. That was all they knew all they wanted to know. "You do your job, we all get well," Abruzzi had told them. "What's to know?"

They had heard things,, of course. That there was a place in Colorado that was completely neutral ground. A place where even a crazy

little West Coast hood like Tony Giorgio could sit down and have a fancy brandy in a balloon glass with the Gray Old Men who saw him as some sort of homicidal stinging insect to be crushed. A place where guys from Boston who had been used to putting each other in the trunks of cars behind bowling alleys in Malden or into garbage cans in Roxbury could get together and play gin and tell jokes about the Polacks. A place where hatchets could be buried or unearthed, pacts made, plans laid. A place where warm people could sometimes cool off.

Well, here they were, and it wasn't so much - in fact, both of them were homesick for New York, which was why they were talking about the Yankees. But they never saw New York or the Yankees again.

Their voices reached down the hall to the stairwell where the murderers stood six risers down, with their stocking-covered heads just below line of sight, if you happened to be looking down the hall from the door of the Presidential Suite. There were three of them on the stairs, dressed in dark pants and coats, carrying shotguns with the barrels sawed off to six inches. The shotguns were loaded with expanding buckshot.

One of the three motioned and they walked up the stairs to the hall.

The two outside the door never even saw them until the murderers were almost on top of them. One of them was saying animatedly, "Now you take Ford. Who's better in the American League than Whitey Ford? No, I want to ask you that sincerely, because when it comes to the stretch he just

The speaker looked up and saw three black shapes with no discernable faces standing not 10 paces away. For a moment he could not believe it. They were just standing there. He shook his head, fully expecting them to go away like the floating black specks you sometimes saw in the darkness. They didn't. Then he knew.

"What's the matter?" his buddy said.

The young man who had been speaking about Whitey Ford clawed under his jacket for his gun. One of the murderers placed the butt of his shotgun against a leather pad strapped to his belly beneath his dark turtleneck. And pulled both triggers. The blast in the narrow hallway was deafening. The muzzle flash was like summer lightning, purple in its brilliance. A stink of cordite. The young man was blown backward down the hall in a disintegrating cloud of Ivy League jacket, blood, and hair. His arm looped over backward, spilling the Magnum from his dying fingers, and the pistol thumped harmlessly to the carpet with the safety still on.

The second young man did not even make an effort to go for his gun. He stuck his hands high in the air and wet his pants at the same time.

"I give up, don't shoot me, it's OK-!"

"Say hello to Albert Anastasia when you get down there, punk", one of the murderers said, and placed the butt of his shotgun against his belly.

"I ain't a. problem, I ain't a problem!" the young man screamed in a thick Bronx accent, and then the blast of the shotgun lifted him out of his shoes and he slammed back against the silk wallpaper with its delicate raised pattern. He actually stuck for a moment before collapsing to the hall floor.

The three of them walked to the door of the suite. One of them tried the knob. "Locked."

"OK."

The third man, who hadn't shot yet, stood in front of the door, leveled his weapon slightly above the knob, and pulled both triggers. A jagged hole appeared in the door, and light rayed through. The third man reached through the hole and grasped the deadbolt on the other side. There was a pistol shot, then two more. None of the three flinched.

There was a snap as the deadbolt gave, and then the third man kicked the door open. Standing in the wide sitting room in front of the picture window, which now showed a view only of darkness, was a man of about 35 wearing only jockey shorts. He held a pistol in each hand and as the murderers walked in he began to fire at them, spraying bullets wildly. Slugs peeled splinters from the door frame, dug furrows in the rug, dusted plaster down from the ceiling. He fired five times, and the closest he came to any of his assassins was a bullet that twitched the pants of the second man at the left knee.

They raised their shotguns with almost military precision.

The man in the sitting room screamed, threw both guns on the floor, and ran for the bedroom. The triple blast caught him just outside the door and a wet fan of blood, brains, and bits of flesh splashed across the cherrystriped wallpaper. He fell through the open bedroom doorway, half in and half out.

"Watch the door," the first man said, and dropped his smoking shotgun to the rug. He reached into his coat pocket, brought out a bone-handled switchblade, and thumbed the chrome button. He approached the dead man, who was lying in the doorway on his side. He squatted beside the corpse and yanked down the front of the man's jockey shorts.

Down the hall the door to one of the other suites opened and a pallid face peered out. The third man raised his shotgun and the face jerked back in. The door slammed. A bolt rattled frantically.

The first man rejoined them.

'All right," he said. "Down the stairs and out the back door. Let's go."

They were outside and climbing into the parked car three minutes later. They left the Overlook behind them, standing gilded in mountain moonlight, white as bone under high stars. The hotel would stand long after the three of them were as dead as the three they had left behind.

The Overlook was at home with the dead.

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