STEPHEN KING

ISSUE

The master of modern horror unearths the lost prologue to

THE SHINING BEFORE THE PLAY

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HARD COVER

BEFORE THE PLAY

Stephen King

Scene I: The Third Floor of a Resort Hotel Fallen Upon Hard Times

IT WAS OCTOBER 7, 1922, and the Overlook Hotel had closed its doors on the end of another season. When it re-opened in mid-May of 1923, it would be under new management. Two brothers named Clyde and Cecil Brandywine had bought it, good old boys from Texas with more old cattle money and new oil money than they knew what to do with.

Bob T. Watson stood at the huge picture window of the Presidential Suite and stared out at the climbing heights of the Rockies, where the aspens had now shaken most of their leaves, and hoped the Brandywine brothers would fail. Since 1915 the hotel had been owned by a man named James Parris. Parris had begun his professional life as a common shyster in 1880. One of his close friends rose to the presidency of a great western railroad, a robber baron among robber barons. Parris grew rich on his fiend's spoils, but had none of his friends colorful flamboyancy. Parris was a gray little man with an eye always turned to an inward set of accounting books. He would have sold the Overlook anyway, Bob T. Watson thought as he continued to stare out the window. The little shyster bastard just happened to drop dead before he got a chance.

The man who had sold the Overlook to James Parris had been Bob T. Watson himself. One of the last of the Western giants that arose in the years 1870-1905, Bob T. came from a family that had made a staggering fortune in silver around Placer, Colorado. They lost the fortune, rebuilt it in land speculation to the railroads, and lost most of it again in the depression of '93-'94, when Bob T.'s father was gunned down in Denver by a man suspected of organizing.

Bob T. had rebuilt the fortune himself, single-handedly, in the years 1895 to 1905, and had begun searching then for something, some perfect thing, to cap his achievement. After two years of careful thought (during the interim he had bought himself a governor and a respresentative to the US. Congress), he had decided, in modest Watson fashion, to build the grandest resort hotel in America. It would stand at the roof of America, with nothing in the country at a higher altitude except the sky. It would be a playground of the national and international rich - the people that would be known three generations later as the super-rich.

Construction began in 1907, forty miles west of Sidewinder, Colorado, and supervised by Bob T. himself.

"And do you know what?" Bob T. said aloud in the third-floor suite, which was the grandest set of apartments in the grandest resort hotel in America. "Nothing ever went right after that. Nothing."

The Overlook had made him old. He had been forty-three when ground was broken in 1907, and when construction was completed two years later (but too late for them to be able to open the hotel's doors until 1910), he was bald. He had developed an ulcer. One of his two sons, the one he had loved best, the one that had been destined to carry the Watson banner forward into the future, had died in a stupid riding accident. Boyd had tried to jump his pony over a pile of lumber where the topiary now was, and the pony had caught its back feet and broken its leg. Boyd had broken his neck.

There had been financial reverses on other fronts. The Watson fortune, which had looked so secure in 1905, had begun to look decidedly shaky in that autumn of 1909. There had been a huge investment in munitions in anticipation of a foreign War that did not happen, and had not happened until 1914. There had been a dishonest accountant in the timbering end of the Watson operation, and although he had been sent to jail for twenty long years, he had done half a million dollars worth of damage first.

Perhaps disheartened by the death of his oldest son, Bob T. had become unwisely convinced that the way to recoup was the way that his father had couped in the first place: silver. There were advisers who contended against this, but after the calumny of the head accountant, who was the son of one of his father's best friends, Bob T. trusted his advisers less and less. He had refused to believe that Colorado's mining days were over. A million dollars in dry investments hadn't convinced him. Two million had. And by the time the Overlook opened its doors in the late spring of 1910, Bob T. realized that he was precariously close to being in shirt-sleeves again ... and building on the ruins at the age of forty-five might be an impossibility.

The Overlook was his hope.

The Overlook Hotel, built against the roof of the sky, with its topiary of hedge animals to enchant the children, its playground, its long and lovely croquet course, its putting green for the gentlemen, its tennis courts outside and shuffleboard courts inside, its dining room with the western exposure looking out over the last rising jagged peaks of the Rockies, its ballroom facing east, where the land dropped into green valleys of spruce and pine. The Overlook with its one hundred and ten rooms, its staff of specially trained domestics, and not one but two French chefs. The Overlook with its lobby as wide and grand as three Pullman cars, the grand staircase rising to the second floor, and its ponderous neo-Victorian furniture, all capped by the huge crystal chandelier which hung over the stairwell like a monster diamond.

Bob T. had fallen in love with the hotel as an idea, and his love had deepened as the hotel took shape, no longer a mental thing but an actual edifice with strong, clean lines and infinite possibility. His wife had grown to hate it - at one point in 1908 she told him that she would have preferred competing with another woman, that at least she would have known how to cope with - but he had dismissed her hate as a hysterical female reaction to Boyd's death on the grounds.

"You're not natural on the subject," Sarah had told him. "When you look at that there, it's like there was no sense left in you. No one can talk to you about what it's costing, or how people are going to get here when the last sixty miles of road aren't even paved-."

"They'll be paved," he said quiet "I'll pave them."

"And how much will that cost?' Sarah asked hysterically. "Another million?"

"Nowhere near," Bob T. said. "But if it did, I'd pay it."

"You see? Can't you see? You're just not natural on the subject. It's taken your wits, Bob T.!"

Perhaps it had at that.

The Overlook's premier season had been a nightmare. Spring came late, and the roads were not passable until the first of June, and even then they were a nightmare of washboards and axle-smashing chuckholes and hastily-laid corduroy over stretches of jellied mud. There was more rain that year than Bob T. had ever seen before or since, climaxed by a day of snow flurries in August ... black snow, the old women called it, a terrible omen for the winter ahead. In September he had hired a contractor to pave the last twenty miles of the road that led west from Estes Park to Sidewinder, and the forty miles from Sidewinder to the hotel itself, and it had turned into an expensive, round-the-clock operation to finish the two roads before the snow covered them for the long, long winter. The winter his wife had died.

But the roads and the abbreviated season had not been the worst of the Overlook's first year. No. The hotel had been officially opened on June 1, 1910 at a ribbon-cutting ceremony presided over by Bob T's pet congressman. That day had been hot and clear and bright, the kind of day the Denver Post must have had in mind when they took "Tis a privilege to live in Colorado" as their motto. And when the pet

congressman cut the ribbon, the wife of one of the first guests fainted dead away. The applause that had begun at the cutting of the ribbon dried up in little exclamations of alarm and concern. Smelling salts had brought her around, of course, but she had come back to the world with such an expression of dazed terror on her vapid little face that Bob T. could cheerfully have strangled her.

"I thought I saw something in the lobby," she said. "It didn't look like a man."

Later she admitted that it must have been the unexpected heat after all the chilly weather, but of course by then the damage had been done.

Nor was the tale of that days reverses all told.

One of the two chefs had scalded his arm while preparing lunch and had to be taken to the hospital closest by, far away in Boulder. Mrs. Arkinbauer, the wife of the meat-packing king had slipped while towelling herself dry after her bath and had broken her wrist. And finally, the crowning touch, at dinner that night. Bob T.'s pet congressman swallowed a piece of heavy Western sirloin strip steak the wrong way and choked to death in the full and horrified view of two hundred guests, nearly all of them there at Bob T. Watson's personal invitation.

The pet congressman had clawed and clutched at his throat, he had turned first red and then purple, he had actually begun to stagger among the assembled company in his death-throes, bouncing from table to table, his wildly swinging arms knocking over wine-glasses and vases full of freshly cut flowers, eyes bulging hideously at the assembled revellers. It was as if, one Bob T.'s friends told him much later in private, Poe's story about the Red Death had come to life in front of all of them. And perhaps Bob T.'s chance to make his beloved hotel a success had died on that very first night, had died a

jittering, twitching, miserable death right alongside the pet congressman and in full view of those assembled.

The son of one of the guests who had been invited for the gratis opening week was a second-year med student, and he had performed an emergency tracheotomy in the kitchen. Either he was too late to begin with or his hand shook at a critical moment; in either case the results were the same. The man was dead, and before the end of the week, half the guests had departed.

Bob T. mourned to his wife that he had never seen or heard a spectacular run of bad luck.

"Are you so sure that bad luck is all it is?" She responded, only six months away from her own death now.

"What else, Sarah? What else?"

"You've put that hotel up in the tabernacle of your heart!" She assured him in a shrill voice. "Built it on the bones of your first-born son!"

Mention of Boyd still made his throat roughen, even a year later. "Sarah, Boyd is buried in Denver, next to your own mother."

"But he died here! He died here! And how much is it costing you, Bob T.? How much have you sunk into the wretched place that we'll never get back?"

"I'll get it back."

Then his unlettered wife, who had once kept house for him in a one-room log cabin, had spoken prophecy to him:

"You'll die a poor an sorry man, Bob T. Watson, before you see the first pennyworth of profit from that place."

She had died of influenza, and took her place between her son and her mother.

The season of 1911 had begun just as badly. Spring and then summer had come at more normal times, but Bob T.'s younger son, a fourteen-year-old boy named Richard, had brought him the bad news in mid-April, still a full month before the hotel was due to open.

"Daddy," Richard said, "that bastard Grondin has diddled you."

Grondin was the contractor who had paved the sixty miles of road, at a total cost of seventy thousand dollars. He had cut corners and had used substandard material. After an autumn of frost, a winter of freeze, and a spring of thaw, the paving was breaking up in great, rotted chunks. The last sixty miles of the trip to the Overlook would be impassable by buggy, let alone by one of the new flivvers.

The worst thing about it to Bob T.'s mind, the most frightening thing, was that he had spent at least two days of every week supervising Grondin's work. How could Grondin have slipped the substandard materials past him? How could he have been so blind?

Grondin, of course, was nowhere to be found.

Repaving the roads was more expensive than the original paving had been, because the original paving had to be taken up. It would not serve even as a foundation for the new road. Once again work had to proceed around the clock, entailing overtime wages. There were holdups and snags and confusions. Wagons drawing the materials up from the railhead in Estes Park lost their wheels. Horses burst their hearts trying to draw overloaded wagons up the steep grades. There was a week of rain at the beginning of May. The road was not re-completed until the first week of July, and by then most of the people Bob T. had hoped to draw had made their summer plans and less then half of the Overlook's one hundred and ten rooms were occupied.

In spite of the panicked clamorings of his accountants - and even his son Richard - Bob T. had refused to lay off any of the hotel's staff. He would not even let one of the two expensive chefs go (two new chefs; neither of the two from the previous year had come back), although there was barely enough work for one. He was stubbornly convinced that in late July ... or August ... or

even in September when the aspens had begun to turn ... that the guests would come, the rich would come with their retainers and their hangers-on and their careless money. The statesmen would come, the machine politicians, the actors and actresses who aced the Broadway stage, the foreign nobility who were always in search of a new and diverting place. They would hear about the gorgeous hotel that had been built for their pleasure at the roof of America, and they would come. But they never came. And when

winter put finishes to the Overlook's second season, only one hundred and six guests had signed the register in three months.

Bob T. sighed and continued to stare out the wide window of the Presidental Suite, where in 1922, only one President had actually stayed - Woodrow Wilson. And he had come he had already been a man broken in all the ways a man could be broken - in body, in spirit, in his believability with the people. When Wilson had come here he had been a sorry joke. There had been talk in the country that his wife was actually the President of the United States.

If Sarah hadn't died, Bob T. thought, tracing aimlessly on the window with the tip of his finger, I might have laid them off, some of them at least. she might have badgered me into it. She might have ... but I don't believe it.

You've put that hotel up in the tabernacle of your heart.

The 1912 season had been better. In a manner of speaking, at least, the Overlook had only run eighty thousand dollars in the red. The two previous seasons had cost him over a quarter of a million, not

counting the paving of that double ... no, triple-damned road. When the 1912 season ended he had been hopefully convinced that the pump had finally been primed, that his whining accountants could finally put away their pots of red ink and begin writing with black.

The 1913 season had been better still - only fifty thousand dollars in losses. He became convinced that they would turn the corner in 1914. That the Overlook was gradually coming into its own.

His head accountant had come to him in September of 1914, while the season still had three weeks to run, and advised he filed for bankruptcy.

"What in the name of God are you talking about?" Bob T. asked.

"I'm talking about nearly two hundred thousand dollars in debts which you cannot hope to repay." The accountant's name was Rutherford and he was a fussy little man, an Easterner.

"That's ridiculous," Bob T. said. "Get out of here." His head cook Geroux, would be in soon. They were going to plan the menu for the closing three nights, what Bob T. had conceived of as the Overlook Festival.

The accountant put a thin sheaf of papers down on Bob T.'s desk and left.

Three hours later, after the cook had left, Bob T. found himself looking at the papers. Never mind them, he told himself. Into the wastebasket with them. I'll pink the little bastard, him with his Boston accent and his three piece suits. He was nothing but an incompetent tenderfoot. And did you keep folks on our payroll after they advised you to go into bankruptcy? It was laughable.

He had picked up the papers Rutherford had left, to file them in the circular file, and found himself looking at them. What he saw was enough to make his blood stop in his veins.

On top was a bill from the Keystone Paving Works of Golden. Principal plus interest in the sum of seventy thousand dollars. Account due on receipt of bill. Below that, a bill from the Denver Electrical Outfitters, Inc., who had wired the Overlook for electricity and had installed not one but two gigantic power generators in the cavernous basement. All of this had happened in the

late fall of 1913 when his son Richard had assured him that electricity was not going to go away, and that soon his guests would come to expect it, not as a luxury but a necessity. That bill was in the sum of eighteen thousand dollars.

Bob T. flicked through the remainder of the papers with growing horror. A building maintenance bill, a landscaping bill, the second well he had sunk, the contractors who were even now putting in a health room, the contractors who had just finished the two greenhouses, and last ... last, an itemization in Rutherford's neat and ruthless hand of salaries outstanding.

Fifteen minutes later, Rutherford was standing before him again.

"It can't be this bad," Bob T. whispered hoarsely.

"It is worse," Rutherford said. "If my estimates are correct, you will finish this season twenty thousand dollars or better in the red."

"Only twenty? If we can hold out until next year, we can turn the corner-."

"There is no way we can do that," Rutherford said patiently. "The Overlook's accounts are not depleted, Mr. Watson, they are empty. I even closed out the petty cash account last Thursday afternoon so I could finish making up the staff's pay envelopes. The checking accounts are likewise empty. Your mining interest in Haggle Notch is closed out, as per your order this July. That is everything ... Rutherford's eyes gleamed with brief hope. "That is, everything I know of."

"It's everything!" Bob T. agreed dully, and the hope in Rutherford's eyes was extinguished. Bob T. sat up a little straighter. "I'll go to Denver tomorrow. I'll see about a second mortgage on the hotel."

"Mr. Watson," Rutherford said with a curious gentleness. "You took the second mortgage last winter."

And so he had. How could he have forgotten a thing like that? Bob T. wondered with real fright. The same way he had forgotten two hundred thousand dollars worth of payment due? Just forgotten it? When a man started "just forgetting" things like that, it was time for that man to get out of business before he was pushed out.

But he would not let the Overlook go.

"I'll get a third," he said. "Bill Steeves will give me a third."

"No, I don't believe he will," Rutherford said.

"What do you mean, you don't believe he will, you little Boston bean?" Bob T. had roared. "Billy Steeves and me go back to 1890 together! I got him his start in business ... helped to capitalize his bank ... kept my money in with him in '94 when everybody west of the Mississippi was shitting in their drawers! Hell give me a *tenth* mortgage, or I'll know the reason why!"

Rutherford looked at Bob T. and wondered what he should say, what he *could* say that the old man didn't already know. Could he tell him that William Steeves had put his position as President of the First Mercantile Bank of Denver in severe Jeopardy by granting the second mortgage when the situation at the Overlook was clearly hopeless? That Steeves had done it anyway under the ridiculous conviction that he owed Bob T. Watson a debt (to Rutherford's precision-balanced mind the only real debt was a debt that had been contracted for in triplicate)? Could he tell Watson that even if Steeves cut his own throat and agreed to try and get him a third mortgage that he would succeed in doing nothing but putting himself

on the severely depressed executive job market? That even if the unthinkable happened and the mortgage were issued, it would not be even enough to clear the outstanding debts?

Surely the old man must know those things.

Old man, Rutherford mused. Surely he can't be more than fifty, but right at this minute he looks more like seventy-five. What is there to tell him? That his wife was right, maybe, that the creditors were right. The hotel had sucked him dry. It had stolen his business acumen, his savvy, even his common sense. You needed a special kind of sense to survive in American business, a special kind of sight. And now Bob T. Watson was blind. It was the hotel that had blinded him and made him old.

Rutherford said, "I believe the time has come for me to thank you for my two years of employment and give my notice, Mr. Watson. I'll waive any further emolument." That was a bitter joke.

"Go on, then," Bob T. said. His face was gray and drawn. "You don't belong in the west anyway. You don't understand what the west is all about. You are just a cheap tin Eastern chamberpot with a time-clock for a mind. Get out of here."

Bob T. took the stack of accounts due, tipped them in half, in fourths, and with a clench that went all the way up his arms to his shoulders, in eighths. He threw the pieces in Rutherford's face.

"Get out!" He yelled. "Go on back to Baaston! I'll still be running this hotel in 1940! Me and my son Richard! Get out! Get out!"

Bob T. turned away from the window and looked thoughtfully at the large double bed where President Wilson and his wife had slept ... if they *had* slept. It seemed to Bob T. that a great many people who came to the Overlook slept very poorly.

I'll still be running this hotel in 1940!

Well, in a way that might be true. I just might. He went into the living room, a tall, stooped man, mostly bald now, wearing carpenter's overalls and heavy workshoes instead of the expensive Western boots he had once worn. There was a hammer in one pocket and a keychain in the other, and on the ring attached to the chain were all the keys to the hotel. Better than fifty in all, including a different passkey for each wing of each floor, but none of them were labelled. He knew them all by sight and by touch.

The Overlook had not wanted for a buyer, and Bob T. supposed it never would. There was something about the place that reminded him of that old Greek story about Homer and the sirens on the rock. Businessmen (the Homers of the 20th century) who were otherwise sane and hardheaded, became irrationally convinced that they could take the place over and over beyond their wildest dreams. This pleased Bob T. to no end. It was finding out that he wasn't alone in his craziness, it seemed. Or maybe it was just knowing that the Overlook would never stand empty and deserted. He didn't think he could have borne that.

Despite Rutherford's protests that he could only salvage something declaring bankruptcy and letting the bank sell the Overlook, Bob T. had it himself. He had grown more and more fond of his son Richard - perhaps he would never be able to fill Boyd's shoes but he was a good, hardworking boy and now that his mother was dead they only had each other - and he was not going to let the boy grow up with the stigma of a bankruptcy case hanging over his head.

There had been three interested parties and Bob T. had held on grimly until he got his price, always staying just one jump ahead of the baying creditors who wanted to bring him down and divide the spoils up among themselves. He had called a hundred old debts, some of them going back to his father's time. To keep the Overlook out of the bank's hands and in his own he had browbeaten a widow into hysteria, he had threatened an Albuquerque newspaper publisher with exposure (the news publisher had a penchant for

young, pre-pubescent, actually - girls), he had gotten down on his knees and once begged a man who had been so revolted that he had given Bob T. a check for ten thousand dollars just to get him off his knees and out of his office.

None of it was enough to blot away the rising tide of red ink - nothing could do that, he recognized - but he mustered enough in that winter of 1914-15 to keep his hotel out of receivership.

In the spring he had dealt with James Parris, the man who had begun life as a common shyster. Bob T.'s price - a ridiculously low one - had been one hundred and eighty thousand dollars plus lifetime jobs for himself and his son ... as the Overlook's maintenance men.

"You're insane, man," Parris had said. "Is that what you want to avoid bankruptcy for? So the Denver papers can report you're working as a janitor in the hotel you once owned?" And he reiterated: "You're insane."

Bob T. was adamant. He would not leave the hotel. And for all his cold businessman's talk, he knew that Parris would give in. The cold talk did not hide the funny, eager look in Parris's eyes. Didn't Bob T. know that look well enough? Hadn't he seen it in his own mirror every day for the last six years?

:I don't have to dicker with you over it," Parris had replied, affecting indifference. "If I wait another two months, perhaps only three weeks, you'll crash. And then I can deal with the First Mercantile."

"And they'll charge you a quarter of a million if they charge you a penny," Bob T. replied.

For that Parris had no answer. He could pay the two Watsons' salaries for the rest of their lives out of the money he would save by dealing with this lunatic instead of the bank.

So the deal was made. The one hundred and eighty thousand dollars at last mopped up the red ink. The road was paid for, and the electricity, and the landscaping, and all the rest. Bankruptcy was avoided. James Parris took over in the manager's office upstairs. Bob T. and Dick Watson moved downstairs from their suite in the west wing of the third floor to an apartment in the huge cellar. Their domain was behind a door that said Maintenance Only - Keep Out!

If James Parris had ever thought that Bob T.'s insanity would extend to his work, he was wrong. He was the ideal maintenance man, and his son, who was more fitted for this life than one of affluence and college and business things that made his head hurt to think of them, was his eager apprentice. "If we're janitors," Bob T. had once told his son, "then that thing going on over in France is nothing but a barroom squabble."

They kept the place clean, yes, Bob T. was something of a fanatic about that. But they did more. They kept the generators in perfect running condition. From June of 1915 to this day, October 7th, 1922, there had never been a power outage. When the telephones had been installed, Bob T. and his son Richard had put in the switchboard themselves, working from manuals they had pored over night after late night in preparation. They kept the roof in perfect condition, replaced broken panes of glass, turned the rug in the dining room once a month, painted, plastered, and oversaw the Installation of the elevator in 1917.

And they lived there in the winter.

"Not too exciting up there in the winter, is it?" The bell-captain had asked them once while they were on coffee break. "What do you do, hibernate?"

"We keep busy," Bob T. had answered shortly. And Richard had only offered an uneasy grin, uneasy, yes, because every Hotel had a

skeleton or two in the closet, and sometimes the skeletons rattled their bones.

One late January afternoon when Bob T. had been putting a piece of glass over the top of the reception desk, a terrible noise had come from the dining room, a horrible choking noise that had encased him in horror and had taken him back over the years to that first night, when his pet congressman had choked to death on a piece of steak.

He stood stock-still, willing the noise to stop, but the terrible strangling noises went on and on and he thought, if *I went in there now I'd see him, staggering around from table to table like some awful beggar at a king's feast, his eyes bulging,, begging someone to help him.*

His entire body broke out in gooseflesh - even the thin skin on his back knobbed up into bumps. And as suddenly as it had begun, the choking sound sank to a breathless, gargling moan, and then to nothing.

Bob T. broke the paralysis that had gripped him and lunged for the big double doors that gave on the dining room. Surely time had taken some sort of twist, and when he got inside he would see the congressman stretched out on the floor with the guests gathered helplessly around him. Bob T. would call out as he had on that long-ago day, "Is there a doctor in the house?" and the second-year med student would brush through the crowd and say, "Let's take him into the kitchen."

But when he pushed through the double doors, the dining room was empty, all the tables in one corner with their chairs upturned on them, and there was no sound but the wind singing high around the eaves. Outside It was snowing, obscuring the mountains for a moment and then revealing them for another moment, like the flap of ragged curtains.

There had been other things. Dick reported hearing knocking noises from inside the elevator, as if somebody had been caught in there and was rapping to be let out. Only when he opened the door with the special key and slid back the brass gate, the elevator was empty. One night they had both awakened thinking they heard a woman sobbing somewhere above them, in the lobby it sounded like, and went up to find nothing.

These things had all happened in the off-season, and Bob T. didn't have to tell Dick not to talk about them. There were enough folks, Mr.-High-and-Mighty-Parris among them, who thought they were crazy already.

But sometimes Bob T. wondered if things didn't sometimes happen in season. If some of the staff and some of the guests hadn't heard things themselves ... or seen things. Parris had maintained the quality of the service, and had even added a feature to it that Bob T. had never thought of - a limousine which made a run from The Longhorn House in downtown Denver right up to the Overlook once every three days. He had kept prices low in spite of the inflation the Kaiser's war had brought on, hoping to build the trade. Hoping to build a name. He had added a swimming pool to the hotel's other formidable recreation features.

The people who came to the Overlook to enjoy these features rarely re-booked for a second season, though. Nor did they give the Overlook benefit of that best and cheapest advertising, word-of-mouth, by recommending it to their friends. Some of them would book for a month and then leave in two weeks, shaking their heads in an almost embarassed way and brushing aside Parris's earnest questions: Was something wrong with the food? You were treated poorly? The service was slow? The housekeeping was sloppy ? It seemed it was none of those things. The people left and rarely came back.

Bob T. had been pleased to see the Overlook become something of an obsession with Parris. The man was going gray over it, trying to figure out what was wrong and having no luck.

Had the Overlook ever had a season in the black between 1915 and 1922? Bob T. wondered now, as he sat in the Presidential Suite living room and looked at his reflection. That was between Parris and his accountant, of course, and they had been a couple of close ones. But it was Bob T.'s guess that it never had. Maybe Parris had never let his obsession get out of hand as the Overlook's owner and builder had done (Bob T. sometimes thought these days that he had tried to ride and break whatever jinx had been built into his hotel the way his grandfather would have ridden and broken a wild mustang pony), but he was quite sure that Parris had pumped large amounts of money into the hotel every season without getting anything back, as Bob T. himself had done.

You'll die a poor and sorry man before you see the first pennyworth of profit from that place.

Sarah had told him that. Sarah had been right. She had been right for Parris, too. The shyster might not have been stony broke, but he surely must have been sorry he had ever hooked up to this combination when he died of an apparent heart attack while strolling the grounds this August past.

Bob T.'s boy (although Dick wasn't such a boy now, old enough to drink and smoke and vote, old enough to plan on getting married this December) had himself found Parris early in the morning. Dick had been down in the topiary by the playground with his hedge-trimmers at seven AM and there Parris had been, stretched out stone dead between two of the hedge lions.

It was funny about that topiary; it had become the Overlook's trademark in a way, and it had come into being in a very offhand fashion. It had been the landscaper's idea to fringe the playground

with hedge animals. He had submitted a sketch to Bob T. showing the playground area surrounded by lions, buffalo, a rabbit, a cow, and so on. Bob T. had scratched a go-ahead on the memo accompanying the sketch without a pause. He couldn't remember that he had even thought twice about it, one way or another. But it had often been the playground topiary that that the guests went away talking about instead of the meals or the spare-no-expense decor of the rooms 29 suites. Bob T. supposed it was just another example of how nothing at the Overlook had gone as he had expected.

Parris, they figured, must have gone out for a late evening stroll across the front lawn and the putting green and through the playground to the road. On the way back the heart attack had struck him down. There had been no one to miss him, because his wife had left him in 1920.

In a way, that had been the Overlook's fault, too. In the years 1915-1917, Parris had spent no more than two weeks of the season here. His wife, a sulky, pretty thing who had been something on Broadway, didn't like the place - or so it was rumored. In 1918 they had spent a month and according to the gossip there had been several bitter fights over it. She saying that she wanted to go to the Bahamas or to Cuba. He asking sarcastically if she wanted to catch some kind of jungle rot. She saying that if he didn't take her she would go on her own. He saying that if she did that she could find someone else to support her expensive tastes. She stayed. That year.

In 1919, Parris and his wife stayed for six weeks, occupying a suite on the third floor. The hotel was getting hold of him, Bob T. thought with some satisfaction. After awhile it got so you felt like a gambler who couldn't leave the table.

Anyway, Parris had been planning on a longer stay, and then, at the end of their sixth week, the woman had gone into hysterics. Two of the upstairs maids had heard her, weeping and screaming and

begging for him to take her away, to take her anyplace. They had left that same afternoon, Parris's brow like thunder, his wife's pretty face pale and devoid of make-up, her eyes resting like dark raisins in the hollows of her eyesockets, as if she had been sleeping badly or not at all. Parris had not even stopped to confer with his manager or with Bob T. And when he had shown up in June of 1921, it had been sans wife. The head housekeeper's sister lived in New Jersey, and she sent out one of those gossip papers saying that Parris's wife had asked for a divorce on the grounds of "mental cruelty," whatever that meant.

"What I guess it means," Harry Durker, the groundskeeper told Bob T. over bourbon, "is that she couldn't pan out the gold as fast as she thought she could."

Or was it the Overlook? Bob T. wondered. Anyway, didn't matter. Parris had been up here on opening day of the season just past, the Overlook's thirteenth, and he hadn't left until they carried him off in the Sidewinder funeral hack. The little shyster's will was still in probate, but that matter was going to be quite straightforward. Parris's hotel manager had gotten a letter from the firm of New York lawyers acting as executors, and the letter had mentioned the Brandywine brothers from Texas, who were expected to buy. They wanted to keep Parris's manager on if he wanted to stay, and at a substantially higher salary. But the manager had already told Bob T. (also over bourbon) that he was going to turn the offer down.

"This place is never going to make a go," he told Bob T. "I don't care if Jesus Christ Himself bought the place and got John the Baptist to manage it. I feel more like a cemetery caretaker than a hotel manager. It's like something died up in the walls and everybody who comes here can smell it from time to time."

Yes, Bob T. thought, that's exactly what it's like. Only ain't it funny how something like that can sometimes get a hold on a man?

He stood up and stretched. Sitting here and thinking over old times was all very well and good, but it wasn't getting the work done. And there was a lot of it this winter. New elevator cables to be put in. A new service shed to be built out back, and that had to be done before the snow flew and cut them off. The shutters had to be put up, of course, and-

Bob T., on his way to the door, stopped dead still.

He heard, or thought he heard, Boyd s voice, high and young and full of joy. It was faint with distance, but unmistakably Boyd's. Coming from the direction of what was now the topiary.

"Come on. Rascal! Come on! Come on! Go it!"

Rascal? The name of Boyd's pony.

Like a man in a dream, like a man caught in some slow and slushy delirium, Bob T. turned to the wide window. Again that curious feeling of time doubling back on itself. When he reached the window and looked out he would not see the hedge animals because the year was 1908 and the topiary had not yet been set in. Instead he would see a buddy stretch of hill clumped and clotted with building materials, he would see a pile of new lumber where the entrance to the playground would later be, he would see Boyd racing toward that pile of lumber on board Rascal, he would see them go up together, he would see Rascal's rear feet catch the top of the pile, and he would see them tumble down, together with all grace gone, and hope of life with it.

Bob T. staggered toward the window where he would see these things, his face dough-pale, his mouth a slack wound. He could hear- surely it was not only in his mind? - hoofbeats drumming on muddy ground.

"Go it, Rascal! Get up, boy! Get-"

A thudding, flat crack. And then the screaming began, the high, unhuman scream of the pony, the rattle of boards, the final thud.

"Boyd!" Bob T. screamed. *"Oh my God, Boyd! BOYD!"*

He struck the window forcibly, shattering three of the six panes of glass. Drawing a jagged though shallow cut across the back of his right hand. The glass fell outward, turning over and over, twinkling in the sun, to strike and shatter on the outsloping second floor roof below.

He saw the lawn, green and manicured, sloping smoothly down to the putting green and beyond it to the topiary. The three hedge lions that guarded the gravelled path were crouched in their usual half-threatening, half-playful postures. The hedge rabbit stood on its hind legs with its ears perked up cockily. The hedge cow stood as was its wont, cropping at the grass, now with a few autumn-yellow aspen leaves caught on its head and stuck to its sides.

No pile of lumber. No Boyd. No Rascal.

Running footsteps up the hall. Bob T. turned to the door just as it opened and Dick hurried in with his tool box in one hand.

"Dad , are you all right?"

"Fine."

"You're bleeding."

"Cut my hand," Bob T. said. "Tripped over my own stupid feet and hit that window. Guess I made us some work."

"But you're all right?"

"Fine, I told you," he said testily.

"I was down at the end of the hall, looking at those elevator cables. I thought I heard someone outside."

Bob T. looked at his son sharply.

"You didn't hear anyone, did you, daddy""

"No," Bob T. said. He took his handkerchief out of his back pocket and wrapped it around his bleeding hand. "Who'd be up here this time of year?"

"That's right," Dick said. And his eyes and his father's eyes met with kind of electric shock, and in that second they both saw more than they might perhaps have wished. They dropped their eyes simultaneously.

"Come on," Bob T. said gruffly. "Let's see if we've got the glass to fix this bastard."

They went out together and Bob T. spared a single backward glance at the living room of the Presidential Suite with its silk wallpaper and its heavy furnishings dreaming in the late afternoon sun.

Guess *they'll have to carry me out in the meatwagon, the same as they did Parris,* he thought. *Only way they'll get me to leave.* He looked with love at his son, who had drawn ahead of him.

Dick, too. This place has got us, I guess.

It was a thought that made him feel loathing and love at the same time.

Scene II. 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 ten days slumbered beside her. Sleeping the sleep of the just was how some might have ut 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 a foundry in Ohio, and extensive agricultural holdings in the south - cotton and citrus and fruit. Old money was always better than *noveau 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 in spite of 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 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 multi-millions instead of just one or two millions 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 *letters ... and 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 every 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 criggled and croggled 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. Verecker was in his early seventies, a surgeon who had retired following a near-fatal heart attack. His wife smiled a lot, spoke softly, and had eyes like shiny nickles. 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 ago, after the doctor and his wife had made a bid of four clubs that they had absolutely no right to make, Lottie had mussed

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," Bill said, 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 nickle-bright eyes, would tell her husband that she had thought them such a nice couple, so loving, but when she rumpled the cards like that she had looked just like a female shrew ... or was that a shrewess?

Bill was staring at her with his jaw agape.

"I'm very sorry," she said, 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," the doctor said. "Usually this mountain air ... we're almost twelve thousand 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 a 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. The 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 sometime or another.

The dreams that 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. Even though the stupid hotel was only half-full, 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 corpse-hue, his eyes sunken, the 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 husked and empty voice. The doors drew open to reveal flames and basalt plateaus and the stench of brimstone. The elevator operator had taken her to hell.

In another near the end of the afternoon 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 Breughel landscape, a moment of sunshine and low pressure. And she felt something behind 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 green 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 nightdress 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 the elevator or away from it. She had rounded a comer and had seen Bill standing outside the window at the end, motioning her forward. Somehow she had run all the way to the back of the hotel and 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 that she had seen spotted along the corridor walls, white canvas hose in a bright red frame. It had come alive somehow. 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 hungry 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, and Bill Pillsbury sleeping the sleep of the justly stupid beside her. She had been running sweat, and if it hadn't been so late she would have gotten 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 the command of your ship voluntarily, and she had sworn to herself that she would never do that.

But for the next four days ... well, he played shuffleboard in the mornings with his nickle-eyed 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 whim-whams. Four more days, and that was plenty. It had been a mistake, all right, but it was a mistake she would never admit, or have to admit. in fact, she was sure that she could

You had to keep an eye on the boiler because if you didn't, she would creep 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? Is that like the hedges, maybe? She'd had a dream where the hedges crept. And a firehose that had - 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 awhile, 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 it the same way we always worked 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. Like 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 was alive!

And that was when the hand reached out *unseen from* under the bed and gripped her wrist firmly ... almost lecherously. A finger-like canvas scratched suggestively against her palm and something was under there, something had been under there all the 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 it was past her thumb, and it was some time before the realized she was saying, "It crept under the bed. It crept under the bed."

And even though they flipped up the coverlet and Bill had actually lifted 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 these things more and more. She committed suicide in a Yonkers motel room in the year 1949, a woman who was prematurely gray and prematurely lined. It had been twenty years and a the hand that had gripped her wrist when she reached down to get her 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.*

Scene III: On the Night of the Grand Masquerade

Downstairs, upstairs, in corners and hallways, the party went on and on. The music was louder, the laughter was louder, the shrieks were louder and sounded less and less like cries of pleasure and amusement to Lewis Toner's ears and more like cries of agony, the sound of death-throes. Perhaps they were. There was a monster in the hotel. As a matter of fact, a monster *owned* the hotel now. His name was Horace Derwent.

Lewis Toner, who had come to the ball as a dog (at Horace's request, of course), reached the second floor and began to walk down the hall toward his room, his shoulders slumped inside the hot costume. The dog's head, its muzzle set in a snarling rictus, was under arm.

He turned a corner and there was a couple entwined by one of the fire extinguisher hoses, one of the Derwent Enterprises secretaries - Patty? Sherry? Merry? - and one of Derwent's bright young subalterns, a fellow named Norman something. At first he thought the girl was wearing a skin-tight ballerina's leotard and then he realized it *was* skin - she was naked from the waist down. Norman was wearing some sort of Arabian nights thing, complete with slippers that came to upturned points. His little toothbrush

moustache, grown in imitation of the boss, looked ridiculous in contrast.

Patty-Sherry-Merry giggled when she saw him and made no attempt to cover herself. She was openly caressing Norman. The thing was turning into an orgy.

"It's Lewis," she said. "Woof-woof, doggie."

"Do a trick," Norman said thickly, breathing scotch fumes into his face "Up, boy, up! Roll over! Shake hands."

Lewis broke into a run, chased by their drunken laughter. You'll find out, he thought. You'll find out when he turns on you like he turned on me tonight.

At first he couldn't get into his room because the door was locked and the key was in his pants pocket and his pants were under the dog costume and the costume's zipper was in the back. He reached and clutched and got it started and finally managed to get it down, knowing that he must look to them grotesquely like a woman wriggling out of her evening dress, and at last the hot, wolly dog costume slipped off his shoulders and pooled around his feet. Behind him their laughter went on and on grinding and mechanical, reminding him of a date he had gone on with his first lover, a career sailor originally from San Diego. Ronnie his name had been, and he always had been called San Diego Dago. Just Dago. They had gone to a carnival, and there had been a funhouse, and to the left of the stage out front, under a huge canvas sign that said House of a Thousand Thrills, there had been a mechanical clown that laughed on and on the way they were laughing at him now as he fumbled his room key from his pocket, on and on the clown had laughed, prisoner of some circulating tape loop in its guts, cackling into an uneasy night of shrieking carnival rides and cruising men and beer and unshaded bulbs. Its mechanical body had leaned back and forth as it laughed, and it had seemed to Lewis then that it was laughing

at him, a slight boy of nineteen, wearing spectacles and walking close enough to the heavy-set, thirtyish sailor so that their hips brushed from time to time with some miserable electricity. The clown shrieked hoarse laughter, laughing at him the way the half-naked couple down the hall was laughing, laughing the way all of them had laughed downstairs in the ballroom when Horace Derwent put him through his paces.

Woof-woof, do Roll over. Shake hands.

The key turned-in the lock, he was inside, it was locked behind him.

"Thank God," Lewis murmured, and put his forehead against the door. He fumbled at the bolt and shot it. He put on the safety chain. At last he sat on the floor and pulled off the dog costume, pulled it all the way off. He threw the head onto the sofa, where it snarled at itself in the dressing table mirror.

He had been Horace's lover for how long? Since 1939. Could it really be seven years now? It could. It was. People had told him that Derwent could go both ways and Lewis hadn't believed them. Hadn't believed, that wasn't quite right.

It was immaterial to you, the room seemed to whisper to him.

He looked around gratefully. That was it, that was just it. He had joined the Derwent organization as a bookkeeper ten years ago, in 1936, just after Derwent had picked up the movie studio on the depression market. Derwent's Folly, people had called it then. They didn't know Horace Derwent, Lewis reflected.

Horace wasn't like the others, the quick fumbles in the park, the sailors, the fat and sweaty high school boys who spent too much time in the movie theater bathrooms.

I know what I am, he had told Lewis, and locks and chains of fear, long rusted, had fallen from Lewis's heart, as if Horace had touched

some secret place in him with a magic wand. I *choose to accept what I am. Life* is too *short* to *let the world tell a man what he should do and what he shouldn't.*

Lewis had been the head accountant of Derwent Enterprises since early 1940. He had an apartment on the East Side of New York City, and a bungalow in Hollywood. Horace Derwent had a key to each. And some nights he would lie awake beside the big man (Lewis weighed 135, and Horace Derwent lacked eleven pounds of weighing twice that) until gray dawn was prying at the curtains, listening as Derwent poured out everything ... his plans to become the richest individual on planet Earth.

The war is coming, Derwent said. We'll *be in it by April of 1942 and if we're lucky it will go on until 1948. Derwent Enterprises can plan on making three million dollars a year on the aircraft side alone. You figure it out, Lew. When the war ends, Derwent is going to be the biggest company in America.*

It was not always business. It was a hundred other things. Derwent speculating on how much could be made on a World Series if you could pocket two of the umpires. Derwent talking about Las Vegas and the plans he and some of his business associates had for it - Vegas will *be the playground of America in the 1960s if things go right, Lew.* His obsessional fear of cancer, which had killed his mother at forty-six and all four of his grandparents. His interest in geology, in long-range weather prediction, photo-copying machines, and a possible something called 3-D movies. Lewis had listened to these long rambling monologues enthralled, rarely speaking, thinking: *He tells me these things. Only me.*

And so when people told him that Horace made it a practice to lay any new female studio acquisitions before signing them, when they told him that he kept a woman who was the current toast of Broadway in a 5th Avenue penthouse apartment, when they told him that Horace was a perfect study in amorality, a man who honestly

thought himself the only totally alive being in the world, Lewis laughed them off. They didn't know the man the way he did, they had not listened to him talk the night away, leaping from subject to subject like a ballet dancer ... or like something rather more deadly, a fencer perhaps, the greatest natural fencer of his time.

He dragged himself to his feet and went into the bathroom to draw a tub of hot water. His body was slicked with sour sweat. His head ached. His stomach was upset. And he knew that even with a hot tub there would be no sleep for him tonight. And he hadn't brought his sleeping pills. He had even been lucky to get a seat on a connecting flight from New York to Denver. He hadn't been invited on Horace's chartered planeload of revellers. Even his invitation had arrived late. Another studied insult.

The bathroom was spare white tile, old fashioned, hopeless. Lewis put the plug in the tub and turned it on. He would lie sleepless in his bed all night, listening to the shrieks of merriment from below, playing the evening's waking nightmare over again and again ... why had he forgotten his pills?

Roll over, doggie. Play dead. Woof-woof.

Horace had put on the golden chain in 1939, and when it served his purpose he had knocked it off. That had happened tonight. Lewis had been savaged in front of the whole crowd.

But didn't you know it was coming? He asked himself wretchedly as the water roared into the tub, smoking. The keys to the apartment and the bungalow had come back to him in a Derwent Enterprises envelope with an impersonal note from Horace's personal secretary saying that Lewis must have misplaced these. It suddenly became very difficult to see the boss, who was often tied up. Lewis was passed over for the board position that opened up when old Hanneman had a heart attack ... a board position that Horace had practically promised him in the spring of 1943. Horace had been

seen around New York squiring the Broadway actress, which did not bother Lewis, and also with his new social secretary, which definitely did. The new social secretary was British, a small compact man who was ten years younger than Lewis. And of course Lewis had never been that handsome. Worst, Horace had purchased the Overlook without even telling him, his own head accountant. It had been Burrey, one of the execs in the aircraft division, who had taken enough pity on Lewis to tell him that he was head accountant now in name only, by contract only.

"He's out to get you, boyo," Burrey said. "He's got a sharp stick with your name on it. He won't fire you or demote you, it's not his style. That's not how our Fearless Leader has his fun. Hell poke you with that sharp stick. In the legs, in the belly, in the neck, in the balls. Hell poke you and poke you until you run away. And if you stay on after he's gotten tired of the game, hell poke your eyes out with his stick."

"But why?" Lewis cried. "What did I do? My work has been perfect, my ... my ..." But there was no way to talk about that to Burrey.

"You didn't do anything," Burrey said patiently. "He's not like other people, Lew. He's like a big, smart bab with a lot of pretty toys. He plays with one until he gets tired of it, then he throws it away and plays with a new one. That limey Hart is the new one. You got the toss. And I in warning you. Don't push it. He'll make you the sorriest man alive if you do."

"Has he talked to you? Is that it?"

"No. And I'm not going to talk to you anymore. Because the walls around here have ears and I like my job. I like to eat even better. Good morning, Lew."

But he hadn't been able to leave it alone. Even when the invitation to the masked ball had arrived late (with no accompanying letter about the Derwent charter flight from New York to Colorado) he hadn't been able to leave it alone. He had been invited by Horace's

commanding scrawl across the bottom of the invitation, written in draftsman's pencil as so much of his personal and inter-office correspondence was: *If you come, come as a dog.*

Even then, even though the truth of everything Burrey had said was borne out in that one scrawled sentence, he had not been able to let go of it. He had preferred to see it as Horace's own personal request, albeit brusque, that he attend. He had gone to the most expensive costumer in New York and even as he walked out with it wrapped in brown paper under his arm, he had refused to see it the other way. He had wanted to see it as *Come home, Hon, all is forgiven* and not *If you come, I'll poke your eyes out, Lewis - this is your only warning*.

And now he knew. Oh yes, he knew. Everything.

The tub was full. Lewis turned off the water and slowly stripped off his clothes. A hot tub was supposed to relax you, they said. Help you to sleep. But nothing would help him tonight except his pills. Which were in the medicine cabinet of his apartment, two thousand miles east of here.

He turned his eyes to the bathroom medicine cabinet without much hope. There was never anything in a hotel medicine cabinet except maybe a box of tissues. Nevertheless he opened it and stared in, hardly believing it. There was a hotel-sized box of Kleenex, a water glass wrapped in waxed paper, and a small bottle labelled simply Seconal. He took the bottle out and opened it. The pills inside were large and pink. They looked like no Seconals Lewis had ever seen before.

I'll only take one, he thought. Stupid to take someone else's medicine anyway. Stupid and dangerous. And the hotel had stood vacant since 1936, he reminded himself, when the last owner had gone broke and shot himself. Surely those pills couldn't have been there since 1936? An uncomfortable thought. Maybe he'd better not take any.

Up, boy, up! Woof- Woof!. Good doggy ... here's a bone, doggy.

Well , just one then. And a hot tub. Maybe I will sleep.

But it was two of the pills he shook out into his hand, and after he had unwrap d the water glass and taken them, he decided to take a third. Then into the bathtub. A quick soak. Things would look better in the morning

They found him at just past three o'clock the next afternoon. He had apparently fallen asleep in the tub and drowned, although the coroner, who was from Sidewinder, wasn't exactly sure how an accident like that could have happened, unless the man had been drunk or drugged. The postmortem showed no sign of either. The coroner asked for a private audience with Horace Derwent, and the audience was granted.

"Listen here," the coroner said. "You said on the stand that there was quite a party going on that night."

Horace Derwent agreed that that was so.

"Could it have been that somebody might have gone up to this fella Toner's room and sort of held his head underwater? For a joke, I mean. The kind of joke that sometimes can go too far."

Derwent demurred strongly.

"Well, I know you are a busy man," the coroner said, "and the last I want to do is to cause any trouble for a man who helped us to win the war or the man who is planning to reopen the Overlook Hotel ... the Overlook always drew a lot of its chambermaids and busboys and so on from right here in Sidewinder, you know ..."

Derwent thanked him for the compliment and assured him that the Overlook would continue to make use of the Sidewinder work force.

"But," the coroner said, "you have to understand the position I am in."

Derwent said he would do his best.

"With the water in Toner's lungs, the county pathologist says drowning was the cause of death. But a man don't just *drown* in the bathtub. If he falls asleep and his mouth and nose slip under, he will wake up unless his reflexes are severely depressed. But this man had only a trace of alcohol in him, no barbituates, no nothing. There was no bump on his head to indicate he might have slipped getting out. You see what a cat's cradle I am in?"

Derwent agreed it was purely a puzzle.

"Now I have to at least think someone might have murdered him," the coroner went on. "Suicide's out. You can kill yourself by drowning, but I just don't think you can do it in your bathtub. But murder! Well."

Derwent enquired about fingerprints.

"Now that's sharp," the coroner said admiringly. "You're probably thinking of the cleaning that place took in the month before you had your party. The chief of police, he thought of that too, since his sister was one of the girls from Sidewinder that helped to do the job. Why, there was thirty of them up there if there was one, scrubbing that place from stem to stem. And since there was no other help there when your party was held, our chief had a man from the State Police come up and dust the whole room. They only found Toner's fingerprints."

Derwent suggested that went a long way toward disproving the murder theory.

"Oh, but it don't," the coroner said, fetching a deep sigh from the foundations of his large belly. "It might, if you folks had been having

any sort of a regular party. But it wasn't a regular party; it was a costume party. And God knows how many people were wearing gloves or false hands as part of their outfits. You know that fella Hart? The limey?"

Derwent admitted knowing his social secretary.

"That guy said he came as a devil and you came as a circus ringmaster. So you were both wearing gloves. In a manner of speaking, Toner himself was wearing gloves, when you think of his dog costume. So you see the bind we're in?"

Derwent said he saw.

"It don't make me happy to have to instruct that jury to bring in an 'unknown causes' verdict. That will make every goddam paper in the country. Millionaire Industrialist. Mysterious Death. All-Night Orgy in Mountain Resort."

Derwent protested with some asperity that it had been a party, not an orgy.

"Oh, but it's all the same to those guys on the yellow sheets," the coroner said. "They could find a do turd in a basket of easter lillies. It puts a black mark beside your name before you even get the place opened up again. It makes it so you have to start out under a cloud. What a bitter bitch."

Horace Derwent leaned forward and began to talk. He discussed a great many aspects of life and finance in the small mountain community of Sidewinder, Colorado. He discussed various contracts that might be drawn between the Overlook Hotel and the Municipal Board of Sidewinder. He discussed the town's need for a library and for a school addition. He commiserated with the coroner on the coroner's own salary, so inadequate for a retired G.P. The coroner began to smile and nod. And when Horace Derwent stood up, looking a little paler than usual, the coroner stood with him.

"I believe it might have been some sort of seizure," the coroner said. "Accidental death. Unfortunate."

The story made no more than page two, even in the Colorado papers. The Overlook opened on schedule, and nearly fifty percent of the staff came from Sidewinder. It was good for the town. The new library, donated by the Automatic Service Company of Colorado (which was in turn owned by the Automatic Service Company of America, which was in turn owned by Derwent Enterprises), was good for the town. The police chief got a new cruiser and was able to buy a ski-lodge in Aspen two years later. And the coroner retired to St. Petersburg.

The Overlook eventually proved too much for Horace Derwent, too, although it was never able to bankrupt him. But he had conceived it as a glorious sort of toy for him to play with, and the toy had gone sour for him when Lewis had, in a way, turned the tables on Derwent's revenge by dying so inexplicably in the bathtub. He had been forced to buy a whole town to even commence operations at his hotel, but that was not the humiliation, that was not what made him hate Lewis for the way he had died. It was being held up for common blackmail by a grinning small-town coroner and having to give in. Years later, long after he had washed his hands of the Overlook, Derwent would wake up the night from a dream of that coroner's voice as he slowly and efficiently beat him into a corner that he would have to pay to get out of.

He would lie in the dark aftermath of the dream thinking: *Cancer. My mother was dead of cancer at my age.*

And of course, he had never really been able to wash his hands of the Overlook, not entirely. His relationship with it ceased, but not its relationship with him. It only went underground. It existed in secret books kept behind vault doors in places like Las Vegas and Reno. It belonged to people who had done him favors, to whom he owed favors in return. The kind of people that sometimes surfaced in the

bright are of some Senate subcommittee's publicity. Ownership shuffles. Laundered money. Hiding places and secret sex. No, he had never really gotten shut of the Overlook. Murder had been done there - somehow - and would be done there again.

Scene IV. And Now this Word from New Hampshire

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

Jacky was sitting on the front step of the porch and 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 his old man, who looked like a giant malevolent ghost in his hospital whites. He was an orderly at the Berlin Community Hospital. His father was like God, like Nature, sometimes lovable, sometimes terrible. You never knew which it would be. Jacky's mother feared and served him. His 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, 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 frightful force, the killing force just barely held back by some other thing, and Jacky 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, lawnmowered brush of his crewcut, 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 cracked rough leather of the belt that held up his white pants and say *Walk 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 on his ass with churchbells in his head and a split lip.

"Shitass," his father said, giving it the broad A.

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

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

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 his hospital whites, a juggernaut of doom following his son from the front yard to the back.

Jacky ran for his life. The treehouse, 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. Oh 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 bellowing father in persuit. 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 safe behind her teeth. She was afraid for her son, more afraid that her husband would turn on her.

"No you don't Come back here!"

Jacky reached the large elm in the back yard, the elm where last year his father had smoke-drugged a colony of wasps and then

burned their nest with gasoline. The boy went up the haphazardly 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 only succeeded in pulling off Jacky's loafer. Jacky went up last three rungs and crouched on the floor of the treehouse twelve 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 it, 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 and 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!" he 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 whale. Jacky turned around and around on his hands and knees, following the movement. 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 treehouse, one rung snapped off under his hands and he almost fell but caught the next one up with a grunt and a lunge, and 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 his working, congested face was visible over the edge of the treehouse 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 off the ladder backwards, perhaps killed him (but if he had killed him, would anyone have said anything but "Thanks, Jacky"?), but it was love that stopped him, and love that would not let him just put 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, he 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 his belly, driving the wind from his body in a whoosh as he flew from the treehouse platform and fell to the ground, turning over once and 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 is 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 blackness as he fen 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.

Scene V. 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 allies in Malden or into garbage cans in Roxbury could get together and play gin and tell jokes about the Polocks. A place where hatchets could be buried or unearthed, pacts made, plans laid. A place where warm people could sometimes cool off.

Well, they were here, 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 or me three beckoned 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 ten paces away. For a moment he could not believe them. 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. "What-"

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 backwards down the hall in a disintegrating cloud of Ivy League jacket, blood and hair. His arm looped over backwards, spilling the Magnum from his dying fingers, and the pistol thumped harmlessly to he 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 okay-"

"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 slammed him 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."

"Okay."

The third man, who hadn't shot yet, stood in front of the door, levelled 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 thirty-five 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 doorframe, 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 to 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 cherry striped wallpaper. He fell in the open bedroom doorway, half in and out.

"Watch the door," the first man said, and dropped his smoking shotgun to the rug. He reached in 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. It 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.