

KILLER IN THE HOUSE

Robert C. Blackmon

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The time was around ten thirty and Myrtle, the night telephone operator, and I had the Sea View lobby to ourselves.

The bellhops were hiding as usual; the night clerk, Bill, had left the desk for a while; and most of the patrons of the big seashore resort hotel had gone to the first dance of the season at the pavilion two miles down the beach.

I was leaning on the counter beside the switchboard, talking to Myrtle. A house detective always has to be friendly to the help! And Myrtle was blond and pretty and easy to talk to, anyway.

We talked about the season and hoped it would be good, with the war and all. I showed her my registration card, and she was sympathetic about my being deferred because of flat feet. We were getting along just fine, when a light flashed on the board.

Myrtle answered, listened a minute, looking surprised. She turned to me and said shrilly:

"Mr. Pack!"

"Make it just Don, Myrtle." I was still kidding. "After all, we've known each other two days, and we've got the whole season to "

"It's Mr. David Hammond, in Room 712!" she cut me off, talking excitedly. Her blue eyes were scared.

"Something's happened! He groaned into the phone, and now I can't hear him at all! Something's happened!"

That snapped me out of the kidding. If anybody groaned into a phone around the Sea View, I was supposed to do things about it. I left Myrtle and ran to the elevator.

Johnny almost jumped out of his purple uniform when I punched him awake. He was just a kid, about sixteen.

"All the way, partner. Don Pack rides again."

I gave him a grin. A friendly elevator operator can be a very great help to a house detective at times.

"You busted up a swell dream. I was in a bomber over Tokyo and Berlin at the same time." He sent the car up and matched my grin. I knew we'd get along.

We reached the seventh and top floor, and he asked if he should wait. I shook my head, because I wanted this solo until I found out about the groaning.

Johnny went down. I went to Room 712.

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It was down the main hallway, near the service elevator. Being a front room, its windows faced the long balcony overlooking the beach and the ocean. Sea View had the same arrangement on all floors, with two side halls leading from the main hallway to the balcony on each floor. Room 712 was just beyond the second hall on the seventh floor.

I rapped on the door and waited about a minute. There was no answer. My passkey sprang the lock, and I went into the room, the short hair tingling along the back of my neck.

No lights were on in the room, but a sort of gray half-light came in through the two windows that opened out on the balcony. That was enough to show me the white shape of the bed and the figure of the man lying on it. He wasn't moving or making a sound. I stood just inside the doorway, looking at him for a couple of minutes.

Then I remembered I'd seen two or three men drinking a bit heavily down in the bar, earlier in the evening. I didn't remember how any of them looked. Hammond was probably one of them, drunk. I was practically certain of that, but I had to be absolutely certain. Sea View couldn't stand any trouble, right at the start of the season.

Pawing around, I found the switch and the overhead light went on. Every single hair on my head stood up by itself as I looked at the man on the bed.

David Hammond was about forty, and he was short and fat. He was wearing blue-and-white striped pajamas and was lying on his back. His left arm was flung out, his right hand up near his head, and near the pudgy fingers of the right hand was the handset of the telephone. The rest of the instrument was on the bedside table. Hammond's eyes were wide open, staring fixedly at the ceiling. His mouth was open, the lips sagging. There was a brownish-red stain on the front of his pajamas. It covered a space about as big as two hands. Even as I looked, I could see the stain spread slowly, crawling. It made cold prickles run up and down my spine.

A brassy taste started in my mouth, and I could feel cold sweat popping out on my face. I couldn't do anything for a long time but stand and stare at the man on the bed.

The stain on the front of the pajamas was blood. I could see a small slit in the cloth, about in the middle of the stain, and I knew it had been made by the blade of a knife. The slit was about where Hammond's heart should be.

Stiffly, I made it to the bed and stood beside it, looking down at Hammond.

The knife that had killed him wasn't anywhere on the bed, and it was a cinch he hadn't hidden it after sticking himself. Somebody else had stabbed him, and he'd lived long enough to grab the telephone handset and groan into the transmitter. The groan Myrtle had heard was David Hammond dying.

I shuddered, then went stiff all over as another startling thought popped into my mind.

We had a murder in the house and the killer was probably still running around loose in the Sea View Hotel with the knife! Maybe he was right there on the seventh floor with me, and I didn't have anything to fight with but my fists!

My first impulse was to grab the telephone handset from the bed and get somebody else upon the seventh floor with me. Then I realized that losing my head might wreck the whole season for the Sea View Hotel and my job. We had murder in the house, and if I started broadcasting it, people would check out by the dozens. Then we'd have an empty hotel on our hands, right at the very start of the season.

I stood there, wondering what was the best thing to do. The cops should know about it right away, but the nearest town was in Pleasantville, about eighteen miles-away. Even then, we'd have a sheriff, and he'd be sure to bungle

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the thing so Sea View would get a black eye.

The telephone started jingling, and I knew it was Myrtle, trying to raise me. I started to let it go, then knew she'd probably send one of the bellhops up if I didn't answer. Gingerly, I took the handset from the bed.

"All right, Myrtle. This is your big heart throb, Don Pack." I tried to put a grin in my voice, but it didn't sound so good.

"Mr. Pack Don!" Myrtle was badly frightened, but she didn't have a thing on me. "Is Mr. Hammond all right? What "

"Nothing's happened that can't be fixed, my dove," I told her that with sweat standing out like acorns on my face. It was a cinch that Hammond couldn't be fixed, except by a mortician. "Give me the line-up on the seventh floor, quick. I'll wait."

The receiver popped a few times; then she was back.

"Don" her voice was shaking—"there's a young couple in 716 They've gone to the dance. A Mr. Neal Carter in 706, a Mr. Alfred Marsh in 708, and a Mr. James Ollis in 710. The rest of the rooms on the seventh are empty so far, except for 712, Mr. Hammond's." Myrtle caught a shuddery breath. "Bill says the boys had to help Mr. Carter, Mr. Marsh and Mr. Ollis to their rooms this evening, and none of them has come down since. They had been drinking. Does that "

"That's just fine." I raked some of the cold sweat off my face. Myrtle would scream, sure as shooting, if I said anything about murder in the house. Bill, the desk clerk, would do about as bad. "Just stand by the board for "

"But what happened, Mr. Pack Don?" Myrtle broke in shrilly. "Bill asked me "

"I'll issue a communique after a while," I told her. "In the meantime, you stick by the board. Tell Bill if he leaves the desk or opens his mouth, I'll dunk him in the ocean. You two just sit tight and keep quiet. I'll handle everything."

I hang up and started thinking, hard. The help couldn't know about murder in the house, of course. They'd go wild and empty the place in an hour. I had to keep things under control.

The young couple was out, of course. David Hammond was the corpse, so that let him out in more ways than one. That left Neal Carter, Alfred Marsh and James Ollis, the three drunks. I remembered them vaguely, but I'd gone to my room on the third floor early in the evening and had evidently missed the bellhops taking them to their rooms. No one had told me about it.

I stood there, scowling, looking about Hammond's room.

I was on the right side of the bed. The room door was in front of me and slightly to the left. The balcony windows were behind me. The doors to the small bathroom and the smaller clothes closet were to my left, across the room. Both doors were closed.

Hammond's gray suit was on a chair not far from the bed, and I went to it with some idea of finding out something about the dead man. Looking through the pockets, I found a cigarette package, a Sea View Hotel matchbook, a couple of clean handkerchiefs and a black leather wallet. There were no opened letters in his breast pocket.

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I looked through the wallet and found about a hundred dollars in various bills and that was all. There were no lodge or club cards, no business cards. The wallet was new and the factory identification slip had not been filled in. So far as the stuff in his pockets was concerned, the dead man was "Mr. Nobody, from Nowhere."

I thought about examining his luggage, but decided there'd be time to do that later. Right now, a killer with a knife was roaming around the Sea View Hotel, unless he'd holed up in his room somewhere. I had to find him, at least by the time the pavilion dance broke up and the rest of the Sea View patrons started coming back to the hotel.

Moving fast, I checked the two windows opening out on the balcony, and found them locked. I left them that way and went back to the main hallway. My nerves were tight enough to use for harp strings. I went down the hall to Room 710 and tapped on the door.

"All right! All right !" a man inside yelled thickly. "Don't knock all night. Come in!"

I opened the door with my passkey and got a look at James Ollis, the first of the three drunks.

He was short and much fatter than Dave Hammond. He had on a pair of red and yellow pajamas that would make a blind man dizzy. He was sitting up in the middle of the bed, with the bed light on, nursing a half-empty bottle of whiskey. His little blue eyes were bleary and the fringe of curly, brownish hair around his bald spot gave him the appearance of a faded kewpie. His lips sagged wetly, and he stared at me with his eyes out of focus.

"drunk'en all under the table, I did," he told me gravely. "Told'em I could do it. Have a drink, my pal. Thanks. I don't mind if I do."

At any other time, I could have laughed at his drunken dignity as he lifted the bottle and poured about a jigger of Scotch on himself and the bed. The room reeked of the stuff.

"Good, ain't it?" His eyes crossed as he looked at me. "Have a seat. Sit down." He waved a fat hand toward the bureau. "Who are you?"

He dropped the bottle on the bed and scowled. His little blue eyes got mean as he fumbled for the edge of the bed. The bottle gurgled out its contents onto the mattress.

"What's the idea of busting into my room, eh? How come a gen'man can't sleep in this joint, eh? I want the manager! Get me the manager! I'm gonna see what's the matter a gen'man "

He found the edge of the bed and almost tumbled out on the floor. I went over and pushed him back onto the bed. He fell on his back, lying on the whiskey-soaked mattress. He squinted up at me, all the meanness passing out of his bleary eyes in an instant.

"You knew David Hammond?" I asked him. "Room 712?"

Ollis closed his eyes. His lips moved a little.

"Hammond, 712." He shook his head. "Never heard of him. Knew Neal Carter and Alfred Marsh Fine fellows, hut they can't hold their liquor. Told'em they couldn't. We tried it. We found out. I showed 'em, I drank 'em under the table. The bellhops hadda put'em to bed.

His words started blurring together and he kept his eyes closed, his chunky body relaxed on the bed. He opened his mouth wide and started snoring.

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I shut off the light and left the room. James Ollis was in no condition to tell me anything. According to him, both Neal Carter and Alfred Marsh would be in the same condition. But I had to make sure about that. The three drunks were the only ones on the seventh floor with Hammond, and Hammond was dead murdered. He'd been killed not many minutes ago, according to the groan into the phone.

I went along the hallway to 708, Marsh's room, and knocked. There wasn't any answer, but through the panels I could hear a man doing a very noisy job of snoring. My passkey opened the lock, and I went into the room. It smelled strongly of whiskey.

A reading light was on beside a chair near the bed. Alfred Marsh was on the bed, on his back. His mouth was open, and he was snoring loudly. I went over and looked at him.

He appeared to be about thirty-five. He was in shorts and white cotton undershirt, and his arms and legs were knobby, thin. He needed a shave. His clothes were on the chair by the light and there was a folded newspaper on the floor beside the chair.

I went over to the chair, intending to have a quick look for something identifying the man on the bed as Alfred Marsh, but the headlines on the folded newspaper that caught my eye made me forget that. The headlines were marked with pencil. They read:

HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS MISSING.
BANK EMPLOYEE DISAPPEARS.

Colton police officials were faced today with a baffling mystery in the disappearance of Abel Wilmot, for years a clerical employee of the Liberty Trust Co. of this city, and the simultaneous disappearance of a hundred thousand dollars in currency from the company's vaults. Wilmot and the money disappeared, apparently, some time yesterday.

Liberty Trust Co. officials expressed a reluctance to accept the theory that Wilmot absconded with the missing money, giving as their reasons his years of faithful service with the company. The Colton police, however, are inclined to believe that the missing money will be found when Wilmot is apprehended, and have issued a State-wide order for his arrest.

The paper was from Colton, a large city about three hundred miles up the coast, in the next State. It was dated the 19th, two days ago.

I looked at the penciled headlines again, frowning. Then I slid a couple of fingers into the breast pocket of Marsh's coat, on the chair. I found a couple of opened letters, slid them out. They were addressed to Alfred Marsh, in Colton. I put the letters back into Marsh's pocket, turned out the light and left the room.

I had seen nothing that looked like a knife in either his or Ollis' room. I went to 706, Neal Carter's room, and rapped on the door. I didn't expect anyone to answer and no one did.

I opened the door and went in. No lights were on, and there was only the gray half-light from the windows opening on the seventh-floor balcony. By that, I could see the bed and Neal Carter's dark hair. He was lying on his back on the bed.

Standing just inside the door for a moment, I listened to him snore. He didn't miss a beat and the regular noise got on my nerves. I switched on the light and had a quick look around.

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He was Neal Carter, all right, according to the letters and cards in his wallet, and he had come from Colton, as had Marsh. He was in his underwear, as Marsh was, though he was younger and heavier. His body had an athletic stockiness. He appeared to be in about the same stage of drunkenness as Alfred Marsh. James Ollis, apparently, had "drunk'en under the table" in fine fashion. Ollis, however, as well as Marsh and Carter, seemed to be too drunk to even think of knifing David Hammond in 712.

I turned off Carter's light and left the room. My mind was churning.

With the three drunks out of it, and with the young couple at the dance, everybody on the seventh floor was accounted for. There were empty rooms on the seventh floor, though, and the knife-armed killer could be hiding in any of the unoccupied rooms. My stomach got cold as I thought of opening the doors of those empty rooms. Then I remembered that four of them had windows opening out on the seventh floor balcony. By going out on the balcony, I could look in through those windows and perhaps spot the killer without going into the rooms. It sounded good.

Moving fast, I went along the side hall and out on the seventh floor balcony. Steamer chairs made odd shapes along the narrow, tiled space. Beyond the rail, I could see the light mist hanging over the ocean. The surf made a dull and unending rumbling on the beach far below.

Wishing that I'd brought a gun up to the seventh floor with me, I went along the balcony to the far end. Just for luck, I took a look through the windows of 716, the young couple's room. I couldn't see much and kept shading the glass with my hands and changing my position to see better. I did that for about three or four minutes. Then every drop of blood I had seemed to rush into my throat and choke me, as a shrill, terrified scream ripped through the night.

It rose up to an impossibly high note, then dropped abruptly to a choking, bubbling groan. It came from somewhere within the hotel, from the seventh floor, I judged.

Almost blinded by sweat that was rolling off my forehead, I headed for the side hallway door on the run, pounding along the tiled balcony. I made about four steps, then tangled with a steamer chair, and went over on my face on the tile. Maybe I yelled. I wouldn't know. I thought the knifeman had me for a split moment.

Untangling myself from the chair, I got up and went on to the side hall and into the building. I was scared, and I know I was breathing heavily.

I reached the corner of the main hall and turned into the larger passage. I hadn't taken two steps before I saw the thing on the floor near the door of David Hammond's room. It was wrapped in what appeared to be a red and yellow crazy quilt, and I knew who it was.

I reached it and looked down into James Ollis' fat, round face. His small, blue eyes were wide open and staring fixedly, his mouth open and sagging. James Ollis would never drink anybody under the table again. He was dead. Blood from a knife thrust in his chest darkened the brightly-colored pajamas with an irregular, slowly spreading stain. He was lying on the hall carpet not five feet from Hammond's door.

I went to Hammond's door and discovered that it was open about an inch. I had left it closed, its snaplock engaged with the striker plate. Someone had opened Hammond's door after I left it!

Goose pimples came out all over me.

That someone was the knife-armed killer. He had killed James Ollis, though how the short, fat man had got out into the hallway where he was killed, I didn't know. I'd left him in a drunken sleep in his room!

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My mind jumped around like drops of water on a hot griddle. I didn't know what I should do, but I knew I had to do something. We had two murders in the house, now, and the Sea View patrons wouldn't stay at the pavilion dance all night. I had to clean up those murders and get things running smoothly before they got back or else.

Pushing Hammond's door open all the way, I slipped into the room, trying to look in every direction at the same time. I didn't see anything but David Hammond's body on the bed. It hadn't been moved, as far as I could tell.

I switched on the bedside light and got away from it in a hurry. Nothing happened, and I didn't see anything. I went over to the bathroom, pushed the door open and switched on the light. Every muscle in me was jumping. The bathroom was empty. That left the clothes closet.

My fingers were slippery with sweat as I twisted the knob of the closet door and jerked the door wide open. There was nothing in it but a couple of suits and three suitcases. One of the suitcases had been opened, and I saw a paper-taped package of green bank notes. The denomination of the top bill was \$100. My eyes all but dropped out of my head.

Then I heard the rumble of the elevator machinery. Johnny was coming up. He had heard the scream.

Scrambling out of the closet, I ran out into the main hallway, snapping off Hammond's lights on the run. I left the door opened about an inch, as I had found it.

The elevator door clanged open almost as I finished, and Johnny charged out into the seventh-floor hallway, his eyes very bright. His mouth was open to yell; then he saw me. He saw James Ollis' body at about the same instant, and his mouth snapped shut. He started whimpering a little, and his eyes got bigger than I'd ever seen them. He turned toward the elevator.

"Hold it, Johnny," I told him quickly. I got to him and caught his arm. "Keep a stiff upper lip, partner."

I knew I couldn't let him go. He'd drop to the lobby and start yelling murder all over the place. Then the Sea View would be emptied, and my job would be gone. And I wouldn't be the only one to lose out. Myrtle, Johnny, the bellhops all of them would go. The season would be shot.

I pulled Johnny away from the body and along the hallway. My mind was working harder and faster than it ever had worked, I got Johnny down to 708.

Beyond the locked door, Alfred Marsh was snoring even louder than he had been a few minutes ago. Apparently, the scream hadn't reached him. Holding Johnny with one hand, I used the passkey with the other and opened Marsh's door. I stuck my head in and said, keeping my voice low:

"He's passed out, drunk. It couldn't have been him."

Then I eased the door almost shut, leaving it gaping about an inch.

Johnny was jerking in every muscle and nerve as I all but dragged him on down the hallway to 706, Neal Carter's room. Behind the panels, Carter was still snoring loud enough to be heard clearly in the hall.

I opened Carter's door. Sticking my head inside, I said the same thing I'd said in Marsh's room. Then I left Carter's door also ajar an inch.

"I...I" Johnny's voice was a wire-thin whisper.

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I dragged him along the hallway until I was about halfway between Carter's and Marsh's room, then yelled loudly:

"Here! Johnny! You, elevator boy!"

Johnny almost jumped out of his purple uniform. I had him by the arm.

"Come on to the elevator!" I yelled at Johnny, though his face wasn't two feet from my own. "We're going to get the manager! We're going to take a look in Hammond's room and inspect his baggage! Something's wrong in that room! Come on!"

I headed toward the elevator, and Johnny didn't need any pulling along. We made a lot of noise galloping along the hallway, We reached the elevator and Johnny tried to pull away from me and get into it. I wouldn't let him. A push sent the elevator door clanging shut, then I was pulling Johnny across the hallway to David Hammond's room, 712.

Johnny was scared stiff and didn't offer much resistance until I got him into Hammond's room. When he saw Hammond's body on the bed, he started fighting me, and I slapped him just hard enough to make him stop. Rushing him around the bed, I got him into the clothes closet, pushed in after him and pulled the door almost shut. I could see the room in the gray half- light.

"What " Johnny's breathing was shrill and fast. I could feel him jerking against me. The closet was hardly big enough to hold him, the suits, bags and me.

"Shut up, partner. We're going to catch us a killer,"

That shut him up, as I figured it would. I could feel him go stiff against me.

Then the knob of Hammond's door rattled a little. Light spilled into the room as it opened. A man's figure slipped through the opening but he moved so fast I couldn't see his face. He shut the door behind him and headed straight for the clothes closet.

I stopped breathing as I saw the cold glint of steel in his right hand. He reached for the closet door with his left hand.

I yelled as loudly as I could, slapped the closet door wide open and came out of the little space with both fists swinging. The yell, I figured, would scare the man stiff for a split second and give me a chance to knock him cold with my fists before he could get in a slash with the knife.

I was almost right.

Johnny yelled almost as loudly as I did and came out of the closet on my heels. He was swinging a coat hanger he'd grabbed off the rod in the closet.

I swung at the pale blob of the man's face before me and connected with a glancing blow. It didn't do much harm. Steel made a liquid path through the darkness, and I yelled as it sliced into my shoulder. I missed the next punch entirely.

Johnny closed in, yelling and swinging the coat hanger.

The knife-armed man whipped around and sprinted toward the hall door. I saw that he was in his underwear. I went after him. Johnny got in my way, and both of us went to the floor in a sprawling fall. Before either of us

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could get up, the half-dressed killer had got out of the room and closed the door.

Swearing, I went after him. Johnny came along behind me, still swinging the coat hanger. I got the door open, and we plunged out into the hallway.

A man in shorts and a white cotton undershirt was sprinting along the main hallway, toward the other side of the building. There was a knife in his right hand, in the dim light of the hallway, I could see blood on the steel. It must have been my blood, it was so fresh.

I ran faster than I've ever run. I'd always thought a big man couldn't get over the ground fast, but I covered ground then. I made about six long jumps, then went into a plunging dive, my arms out for the moving legs of the man before me. Johnny was running along behind, with the coat hanger,

My hands banged into a bare ankle and I clamped onto it with my fingers. It was almost jerked out of my grip, but I held on, crashed to the floor, and dragged the knife-armed man down with me. I hit on my chest, and the fall all but knocked all the breath out of me.

Grunting, gagging for air, I let go my ankle hold and scrambled forward, pulling myself up and over the half-dressed knifeman. I already knew who he was. I'd known it about a minute.

Cursing, he twisted around on the floor, slashed at me with the bloody knife, and ripped the left sleeve of my best blue suit coat from shoulder to wrist. But the steel didn't get any of me. I hitched up higher, half on my knees and holding myself up mostly with my left arm, and let go a hard right. All of my two hundred and thirty pounds were behind the punch.

My knuckles exploded squarely on the jaw and I felt the shock of the blow all the way to my shoulder. I knew I wouldn't have to hit again for a good half-hour. The man under me went limp, his head banging back against the floor. The knife fell as his right hand opened suddenly. Johnny kicked the weapon twenty feet along the hallway a split second after it hit the floor. He was dancing around us, yelling and waving the coat hanger.

Then it was all over. We had murder, two of them, in the house, but I had the killer. He was Neal Carter, the dark-haired, stocky man from Room 706.

Johnny stared down at him, his mouth jerking with excitement.

"How...what...how " He couldn't get it all out, he was so excited.

"He is the guy who killed David Hammond in Room 712, and James Ollis out here in the hallway." I examined the slit sleeve of my coat and was glad it wasn't my hide. "He was a smart guy, but he wasn't smart enough. It's a pity he can't burn twice."

I punched gently at my slashed left shoulder. It didn't seem as bad as it felt.

"But " Johnny made aimless gestures with the coat hanger.

"It was simple, partner," I gave him a grin. I was going to need him badly in a few minutes. "David Hammond, in Room 712, really isn't David Hammond at all. He's really Abel Wilmot, of Colton, up the coast. He's a thief who stole a hundred thousand dollars in cash from the Liberty Trust Co. in Colton a couple of days ago. The loot is in a suitcase in the closet we hid in a few minutes ago. I saw it."

Johnny made a gulping sound.

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"Carter and Marsh were from Colton. Maybe Ollis was from Colton, too, but that doesn't matter. There was a Colton newspaper in Marsh's room, carrying the story of the missing thief and the money; so it was likely that both Carter and Marsh knew about it, both coming from the same town. The robbery story was penciled, showing they took special note of it. Carter spotted David Hammond of Room 712 as Abel Wilmot, the thief with the hundred thousand dollars. He knew Wilmot would have the stolen money with him."

I felt my slashed shoulder again. It was burning. Carter, lying on the floor in his underwear, was breathing regularly, but he wasn't moving.

"James Ollis' drinking bout tonight was a fair alibi for Carter, though Ollis didn't drink him under the table as he thought. Carter probably dumped some of the drinks and faked the drunken helplessness when the bellhops brought him, Marsh and Ollis upstairs. Carter knew that he, Marsh, Ollis, Hammond Wilmot and the young couple, were the only ones on the seventh floor. The young couple went to the dance: Ollis and Marsh were drunk: so he had a clear field for a try at Wilmot's stolen bank notes.

"Carter went to Wilmot's door and knocked, perhaps called him by his right name. Wilmot opened the door and Carter got into the room. Maybe he tried to muscle in on Wilmot's hundred grand and Wilmot objected. Anyway, Carter stabbed him. But Wilmot lived long enough to grab the handset of the telephone beside the bed and groan into the transmitter. That scared Carter into running, but he took the key of Wilmot's door with him, hoping to get another chance at the money."

The elevator buzzer sounded, and Johnny instinctively turned toward it. I shook my head, and he stopped.

"I went out on the balcony to look through the windows of the unoccupied rooms, trying to spot the killer, and Carter tried for the hundred grand again. He'd faked his snoring drunk when I looked in on him. Ollis, in the meantime, had recovered a little. The name Hammond and Room 712 had stuck in his mind. I'm guessing this, but it must have happened. Ollis drunkenly decided to see Hammond in Room 712. He ran into Carter, who had gone back for the money. Carter had to kill him, because Ollis would have told of seeing him. But Ollis screamed, and Carter was scared off the second time. He ran back to his room and faked the drunken snoring again."

The elevator buzzer sounded again, but Johnny didn't move.

"I knew it was between Marsh and Carter then, because the person who killed Ollis didn't have time to get off the seventh floor before I ran in from the balcony. I merely left their doors open a little, so they'd hear me say we were going to get the manager and search Hammond's room. Carter knew the money would be lost to him then. He thought we went downstairs when the elevator door clanged, tried for the money again, and "

I shrugged, and it made my slashed shoulder hurt.

The telephone in 712 started ringing and I knew it was Myrtle. I talked fast to Johnny, like a big brother.

"You can depend on me to keep my mouth shut," he said. And I knew I could as he swaggered toward the elevator.

I took a look at Carter, to be sure he was still out cold, then went in and answered the telephone in 712. It was Myrtle.

"Don! You're all right ?" She was badly frightened. "We heard something down here. Johnny went up. Bill's been trying to get Johnny back down, but "

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"He's coming, my pet. I'm all right, of course." I poured the oil on thick. "But I found the seventh floor can't be used for a day or two. Tell Bill to switch the young couple from the seventh to a choice room on the sixth, and I'll carry their stuff down myself before they get back from the dance. Nobody but Johnny and me come up to the seventh until I say so; and if I hear any of the help talking about that, I'll get tough. Tell Bill that for me. Now, get me the sheriff's office in Pleasantville, my sweet, and if you listen in papa spank hard."

I couldn't tell her we had two murders, in the house, right then!

THE END.