

THE SHINING

Stephen King



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STEPHEN
KING

THE
SHINING



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By Stephen King
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This is for Joe Hill King, who shines on.

My editor on this book, as on the previous two, was Mr. William G. Thompson, a man of wit and good sense. His contribution to this book has been large, and for it, my thanks.

S.

It was in this apartment, also, that there stood . . . a gigantic clock of ebony. Its pendulum swung and fro with a dull, heavy, monotonous clang; and when . . . the hour was to be stricken, there came from the brazen lungs of the clock a sound which was clear and loud and deep and exceeding musical, but of so peculiar a note and emphasis that, at each lapse of an hour, the musicians of the orchestra were constrained to pause . . . to hearken to the sound; and thus the waltzers perforce ceased their evolutions; and there was a brief disconcert of the whole gay company; and, while the chimes of the clock yet rang, it was observed that the giddiest grew pale, and the more aged and sedate passed their hands over their brows as if in confused reverie or meditation. But when the echoes had fully ceased, a light laughter at once pervaded the assembly . . . and [they] smiled as if at their own nervousness . . . and made whispering vows, each to the other, that the next chiming of the clock should produce in them no similar emotion; and then, after the lapse of sixty minutes . . . there came yet another chiming of the clock, and then were the same disconcert and tremulousness and meditation as before.

But in spite of these things, it was a gay and magnificent revel . . .

E. A. Poe
"The Masque of the Red Death"

The sleep of reason breeds monsters.

Goethe

It'll shine when it shines.

Folk saying

Some of the most beautiful resort hotels in the world are located in Colorado, but the hotel in the pages is based on none of them. The Overlook and the people associated with it exist

wholly within the author's imagination

PART ONE

PREFATORY MATTERS

JOB INTERVIEW

Jack Torrance thought: *Officious little prick.*

Ullman stood five-five, and when he moved, it was with the prissy speed that seems to be the exclusive domain of all small plump men. The part in his hair was exact, and his dark suit was sober but comforting. I am a man you can bring your problems to, that suit said to the paying customer. To the hired help it spoke more curtly: This had better be good, you. There was a red carnation in the lapel, perhaps so that no one on the street would mistake Stuart Ullman for the local undertaker.

As he listened to Ullman speak, Jack admitted to himself that he probably could not have liked any man on that side of the desk—under the circumstances.

Ullman had asked a question he hadn't caught. That was bad; Ullman was the type of man who would file such lapses away in a mental Rolodex for later consideration.

"I'm sorry?"

"I asked if your wife fully understood what you would be taking on here. And there's your son, of course." He glanced down at the application in front of him. "Daniel. Your wife isn't a bit intimidated by the idea?"

"Wendy is an extraordinary woman."

"And your son is also extraordinary?"

Jack smiled, a big wide PR smile. "We like to think so, I suppose. He's quite self-reliant for a five-year-old."

No returning smile from Ullman. He slipped Jack's application back into a file. The file went into a drawer. The desk top was now completely bare except for a blotter, a telephone, a Tensor lamp, and an in/out basket. Both sides of the in/out were empty, too.

Ullman stood up and went to the file cabinet in the corner. "Step around the desk, if you will, Mr. Torrance. We'll look at the hotel floor plans."

He brought back five large sheets and set them down on the glossy walnut plain of the desk. Jack stood by his shoulder, very much aware of the scent of Ullman's cologne. *All my men wear English Leather or they wear nothing at all* came into his mind for no reason at all, and he had to clamp his tongue between his teeth to keep in a bray of laughter. Beyond the wall, faintly, came the sounds of the Overlook Hotel's kitchen, gearing down from lunch.

"Top floor," Ullman said briskly. "The attic. Absolutely nothing up there now but bric-a-brac. The Overlook has changed hands several times since World War II and it seems that each successive manager has put everything they don't want up in the attic. I want rattraps and poison bait sown around in it. Some of the third-floor chambermaids say they have heard rustling noises. I don't believe it, not for a moment, but there mustn't even be that one-in-a-hundred chance that a single rat inhabits the Overlook Hotel."

Jack, who suspected that every hotel in the world had a rat or two, held his tongue.

"Of course you wouldn't allow your son up in the attic under any circumstances."

"No," Jack said, and flashed the big PR smile again. Humiliating situation. Did this officious little

prick actually think he would allow his son to goof around in a rattrap attic full of junk furniture and God knew what else?

Ullman whisked away the attic floor plan and put it on the bottom of the pile.

“The Overlook has one hundred and ten guest quarters,” he said in a scholarly voice. “Thirty of them, all suites, are here on the third floor. Ten in the west wing (including the Presidential Suite), ten in the center, ten more in the east wing. All of them command magnificent views.”

Could you at least spare the salestalk?

But he kept quiet. He needed the job.

Ullman put the third floor on the bottom of the pile and they studied the second floor.

“Forty rooms,” Ullman said, “thirty doubles and ten singles. And on the first floor, twenty of each. Plus three linen closets on each floor, and a storeroom which is at the extreme east end of the hotel on the second floor and the extreme west end on the first. Questions?”

Jack shook his head. Ullman whisked the second and first floors away.

“Now. Lobby level. Here in the center is the registration desk. Behind it are the offices. The lobby runs for eighty feet in either direction from the desk. Over here in the west wing is the Overlook Dining Room and the Colorado Lounge. The banquet and ballroom facility is in the east wing. Questions?”

“Only about the basement,” Jack said. “For the winter caretaker, that’s the most important level of all. Where the action is, so to speak.”

“Watson will show you all that. The basement floor plan is on the boiler room wall.” He frowned impressively, perhaps to show that as manager, he did not concern himself with such mundane aspects of the Overlook’s operation as the boiler and the plumbing. “Might not be a bad idea to put some traps down there too. Just a minute . . .”

He scrawled a note on a pad he took from his inner coat pocket (each sheet bore the legend *From the Desk of Stuart Ullman* in bold black script), tore it off, and dropped it into the out basket. It sat there looking lonesome. The pad disappeared back into Ullman’s jacket pocket like the conclusion of a magician’s trick. Now you see it, Jacky-boy, now you don’t. This guy is a real heavyweight.

They had resumed their original positions, Ullman behind the desk and Jack in front of the interviewer and interviewee, supplicant and reluctant patron. Ullman folded his neat little hands on the desk blotter and looked directly at Jack, a small, balding man in a banker’s suit and a quiet gray tie. The flower in his lapel was balanced off by a small lapel pin on the other side. It read simply STAFF in small gold letters.

“I’ll be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Torrance. Albert Shockley is a powerful man with a large interest in the Overlook, which showed a profit this season for the first time in its history. Mr. Shockley also sits on the Board of Directors, but he is not a hotel man and he would be the first to admit this. But he has made his wishes in this caretaking matter quite obvious. He wants you hired. I will do so. But if I had been given a free hand in this matter, I would not have taken you on.”

Jack’s hands were clenched tightly in his lap, working against each other, sweating. *Officious little prick, officious little prick, officious—*

“I don’t believe you care much for me, Mr. Torrance. I don’t care. Certainly your feelings toward me play no part in my own belief that you are not right for the job. During the season that runs from May fifteenth to September thirtieth, the Overlook employs one hundred and ten people full-time; one for every room in the hotel, you might say. I don’t think many of them like me and I suspect that some of them think I’m a bit of a bastard. They would be correct in their judgment of my character. I have to be a bit of a bastard to run this hotel in the manner it deserves.”

He looked at Jack for comment, and Jack flashed the PR smile again, large and insultingly toothy.

Ullman said: “The Overlook was built in the years 1907 to 1909. The closest town is Sidewinder, forty miles east of here over roads that are closed from sometime in late October or November until sometime in April. A man named Robert Townley Watson built it, the grandfather of our present maintenance man. Vanderbilts have stayed here, and Rockefellers, and Astors, and Du Ponts. Four Presidents have stayed in the Presidential Suite. Wilson, Harding, Roosevelt, and Nixon.”

“I wouldn’t be too proud of Harding and Nixon,” Jack murmured.

Ullman frowned but went on regardless. “It proved too much for Mr. Watson, and he sold the hotel in 1915. It was sold again in 1922, in 1929, in 1936. It stood vacant until the end of World War I when it was purchased and completely renovated by Horace Derwent, millionaire inventor, pilot, film producer, and entrepreneur.”

“I know the name,” Jack said.

“Yes. Everything he touched seemed to turn to gold . . . except the Overlook. He funneled over a million dollars into it before the first postwar guest ever stepped through its doors, turning a decrepit relic into a showplace. It was Derwent who added the roque court I saw you admiring when you arrived.”

“Roque?”

“A British forebear of our croquet, Mr. Torrance. Croquet is bastardized roque. According to legend, Derwent learned the game from his social secretary and fell completely in love with it. Our may be the finest roque court in America.”

“I wouldn’t doubt it,” Jack said gravely. A roque court, a topiary full of hedge animals out from what next? A life-sized Uncle Wiggily game behind the equipment shed? He was getting very tired of Mr. Stuart Ullman, but he could see that Ullman wasn’t done. Ullman was going to have his say, even the last word of it.

“When he had lost three million, Derwent sold it to a group of California investors. The experience with the Overlook was equally bad. Just not hotel people.

“In 1970, Mr. Shockley and a group of his associates bought the hotel and turned its management over to me. We have also run in the red for several years, but I’m happy to say that the trust of the present owners in me has never wavered. Last year we broke even. And this year the Overlook accounts were written in black ink for the first time in almost seven decades.”

Jack supposed that this fussy little man’s pride was justified, and then his original dislike washed over him again in a wave.

He said: “I see no connection between the Overlook’s admittedly colorful history and your feeling that I’m wrong for the post, Mr. Ullman.”

“One reason that the Overlook has lost so much money lies in the depreciation that occurs each winter. It shortens the profit margin a great deal more than you might believe, Mr. Torrance. The winters are fantastically cruel. In order to cope with the problem, I’ve installed a full-time winter caretaker to run the boiler and to heat different parts of the hotel on a daily rotating basis. To repair breakage as it occurs and to do repairs, so the elements can’t get a foothold. To be constantly alert to any and every contingency. During our first winter I hired a family instead of a single man. There was a tragedy. A horrible tragedy.”

Ullman looked at Jack coolly and appraisingly.

“I made a mistake. I admit it freely. The man was a drunk.”

Jack felt a slow, hot grin—the total antithesis of the toothy PR grin—stretch across his mouth. “That it? I’m surprised Al didn’t tell you. I’ve retired.”

“Yes, Mr. Shockley told me you no longer drink. He also told me about your last job . . . your last position of trust, shall we say? You were teaching English in a Vermont prep school. You lost your temper, I don’t believe I need to be any more specific than that. But I do happen to believe that Grady’s case has a bearing, and that is why I have brought the matter of your . . . uh, previous history into the conversation. During the winter of 1970–71, after we had refurbished the Overlook but before our first season, I hired this . . . this unfortunate named Delbert Grady. He moved into the quarters you and your wife and son will be sharing. He had a wife and two daughters. I had reservations, the main ones being the harshness of the winter season and the fact that the Gradys would be cut off from the outside world for five to six months.”

“But that’s not really true, is it? There are telephones here, and probably a citizen’s band radio as well. And the Rocky Mountain National Park is within helicopter range and surely a piece of ground that big must have a chopper or two.”

“I wouldn’t know about that,” Ullman said. “The hotel does have a two-way radio that Mr. Watson will show you, along with a list of the correct frequencies to broadcast on if you need help. The telephone lines between here and Sidewinder are still aboveground, and they go down almost every winter at some point or other and are apt to stay down for three weeks to a month and a half. There is a snowmobile in the equipment shed also.”

“Then the place really isn’t cut off.”

Mr. Ullman looked pained. “Suppose your son or your wife tripped on the stairs and fractured his or her skull, Mr. Torrance. Would you think the place was cut off then?”

Jack saw the point. A snowmobile running at top speed could get you down to Sidewinder in an hour and a half . . . maybe. A helicopter from the Parks Rescue Service could get up here in three hours . . . under optimum conditions. In a blizzard it would never even be able to lift off and you couldn’t hope to run a snowmobile at top speed, even if you dared take a seriously injured person out in temperatures that might be twenty-five below—or forty-five below, if you added in the wind chill factor.

“In the case of Grady,” Ullman said, “I reasoned much as Mr. Shockley seems to have done in your case. Solitude can be damaging in itself. Better for the man to have his family with him. If there was trouble, I thought, the odds were very high that it would be something less urgent than a fractured skull or an accident with one of the power tools or some sort of convulsion. A serious case of the flu, pneumonia, a broken arm, even appendicitis. Any of those things would have left enough time.

“I suspect that what happened came as a result of too much cheap whiskey, of which Grady had laid in a generous supply, unbeknownst to me, and a curious condition which the old-timers call cabin fever. Do you know the term?” Ullman offered a patronizing little smile, ready to explain as soon as Jack admitted his ignorance, and Jack was happy to respond quickly and crisply.

“It’s a slang term for the claustrophobic reaction that can occur when people are shut in together over long periods of time. The feeling of claustrophobia is externalized as dislike for the people you happen to be shut in with. In extreme cases it can result in hallucinations and violence—murder has been done over such minor things as a burned meal or an argument about whose turn it is to do the dishes.”

Ullman looked rather nonplussed, which did Jack a world of good. He decided to press a little further, but silently promised Wendy he would stay cool.

“I suspect you did make a mistake at that. Did he hurt them?”

“He killed them, Mr. Torrance, and then committed suicide. He murdered the little girls with a hatchet, his wife with a shotgun, and himself the same way. His leg was broken. Undoubtedly so drunk

he fell downstairs.”

Ullman spread his hands and looked at Jack self-righteously.

“Was he a high school graduate?”

“As a matter of fact, he wasn’t,” Ullman said a little stiffly. “I thought a, shall we say, less imaginative individual would be less susceptible to the rigors, the loneliness—”

“That was your mistake,” Jack said. “A stupid man is more prone to cabin fever just as he’s more prone to shoot someone over a card game or commit a spur-of-the-moment robbery. He gets bored. When the snow comes, there’s nothing to do but watch TV or play solitaire and cheat when he can get all the aces out. Nothing to do but bitch at his wife and nag at the kids and drink. It gets hard to sleep because there’s nothing to hear. So he drinks himself to sleep and wakes up with a hangover. He gets edgy. And maybe the telephone goes out and the TV aerial blows down and there’s nothing to do but think and cheat at solitaire and get edgier and edgier. Finally . . . boom, boom, boom.”

“Whereas a more educated man, such as yourself?”

“My wife and I both like to read. I have a play to work on, as Al Shockley probably told you. Dan has his puzzles, his coloring books, and his crystal radio. I plan to teach him to read, and I also want to teach him to snowshoe. Wendy would like to learn how, too. Oh yes, I think we can keep busy and out of each other’s hair if the TV goes on the fritz.” He paused. “And Al was telling the truth when he told you I no longer drink. I did once, and it got to be serious. But I haven’t had so much as a glass of beer in the last fourteen months. I don’t intend to bring any alcohol up here, and I don’t think there will be an opportunity to get any after the snow flies.”

“In that you would be quite correct,” Ullman said. “But as long as the three of you are up here, the potential for problems is multiplied. I have told Mr. Shockley this, and he told me he would take the responsibility. Now I’ve told you, and apparently you are also willing to take the responsibility—”

“I am.”

“All right. I’ll accept that, since I have little choice. But I would still rather have an unattached college boy taking a year off. Well, perhaps you’ll do. Now I’ll turn you over to Mr. Watson, who will take you through the basement and around the grounds. Unless you have further questions?”

“No. None at all.”

Ullman stood. “I hope there are no hard feelings, Mr. Torrance. There is nothing personal in the things I have said to you. I only want what’s best for the Overlook. It is a great hotel. I want it to stay that way.”

“No. No hard feelings.” Jack flashed the PR grin again, but he was glad Ullman didn’t offer to shake hands. There were hard feelings. All kinds of them.

BOULDER

She looked out the kitchen window and saw him just sitting there on the curb, not playing with his trucks or the wagon or even the balsa glider that had pleased him so much all the last week since Jack had brought it home. He was just sitting there, watching for their shopworn VW, his elbows planted on his thighs and his chin propped in his hands, a five-year-old kid waiting for his daddy.

Wendy suddenly felt bad, almost crying bad.

She hung the dish towel over the bar by the sink and went downstairs, buttoning the top two buttons of her house dress. Jack and his pride! *Hey no, Al, I don't need an advance. I'm okay for a while.* The hallway walls were gouged and marked with crayons, grease pencil, spray paint. The stairs were steep and splintery. The whole building smelled of sour age, and what sort of place was this for Danny after the small neat brick house in Stovington? The people living above them on the third floor weren't married, and while that didn't bother her, their constant, rancorous fighting did. It scared her. The guy up there was Tom, and after the bars had closed and they had returned home, the fights would start earnest—the rest of the week was just a prelim in comparison. The Friday Night Fights, Jack called them, but it wasn't funny. The woman—her name was Elaine—would at last be reduced to tears and repeating over and over again: “Don't, Tom. Please don't. Please don't.” And he would shout at her. Once they had even awakened Danny, and Danny slept like a corpse. The next morning Jack caught Tom going out and had spoken to him on the sidewalk at some length. Tom started to bluster and Jack had said something else to him, too quietly for Wendy to hear, and Tom had only shaken his head sullenly and walked away. That had been a week ago and for a few days things had been better, but since the weekend things had been working back to normal—excuse me, abnormal. It was bad for the boy.

Her sense of grief washed over her again but she was on the walk now and she smothered it. Sweeping her dress under her and sitting down on the curb beside him, she said: “What's up, doc?”

He smiled at her but it was perfunctory. “Hi, Mom.”

The glider was between his sneakered feet, and she saw that one of the wings had started to splinter.

“Want me to see what I can do with that, honey?”

Danny had gone back to staring up the street. “No. Dad will fix it.”

“Your daddy may not be back until suppertime, doc. It's a long drive up into those mountains.”

“Do you think the bug will break down?”

“No, I don't think so.” But he had just given her something new to worry about. *Thanks, Danny. I needed that.*

“Dad said it might,” Danny said in a matter-of-fact, almost bored manner. “He said the fuel pump was all shot to shit.”

“Don't say that, Danny.”

“Fuel pump?” he asked her with honest surprise.

She sighed. “No, ‘All shot to shit.’ Don't say that.”

“Why?”

“It’s vulgar.”

“What’s vulgar, Mom?”

“Like when you pick your nose at the table or pee with the bathroom door open. Or saying things like ‘All shot to shit.’ Shit is a vulgar word. Nice people don’t say it.”

“Dad says it. When he was looking at the bugmotor he said, ‘Christ this fuel pump’s all shot to shit.’ Isn’t Dad nice?”

How do you get into these things, Winnifred? Do you practice?

“He’s nice, but he’s also a grown-up. And he’s very careful not to say things like that in front of people who wouldn’t understand.”

“You mean like Uncle Al?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Can I say it when I’m grown-up?”

“I suppose you will, whether I like it or not.”

“How old?”

“How does twenty sound, doc?”

“That’s a long time to have to wait.”

“I guess it is, but will you try?”

“Hokay.”

He went back to staring up the street. He flexed a little, as if to rise, but the beetle coming was much newer, and much brighter red. He relaxed again. She wondered just how hard this move to Colorado had been on Danny. He was close-mouthed about it, but it bothered her to see him spending so much time by himself. In Vermont three of Jack’s fellow faculty members had had children about Danny’s age—and there had been the preschool—but in this neighborhood there was no one for him to play with. Most of the apartments were occupied by students attending CU, and of the few married couples here on Arapahoe Street, only a tiny percentage had children. She had spotted perhaps a dozen of high school or junior high school age, three infants, and that was all.

“Mommy, why did Daddy lose his job?”

She was jolted out of her reverie and floundering for an answer. She and Jack had discussed ways they might handle just such a question from Danny, ways that had varied from evasion to the plain truth with no varnish on it. But Danny had never asked. Not until now, when she was feeling low and least prepared for such a question. Yet he was looking at her, maybe reading the confusion on her face and forming his own ideas about that. She thought that to children adult motives and actions must seem as bulking and ominous as dangerous animals seen in the shadows of a dark forest. They were jerked about like puppets, having only the vaguest notions why. The thought brought her dangerously close to tears again, and while she fought them off she leaned over, picked up the disabled glider, and turned it over in her hands.

“Your daddy was coaching the debate team, Danny. Do you remember that?”

“Sure,” he said. “Arguments for fun, right?”

“Right.” She turned the glider over and over, looking at the trade name (SPEEDOGLIDE) and the blue star decals on the wings, and found herself telling the exact truth to her son.

“There was a boy named George Hatfield that Daddy had to cut from the team. That means I wasn’t as good as some of the others. George said your daddy cut him because he didn’t like him and not because he wasn’t good enough. Then George did a bad thing. I think you know about that.”

“Was he the one who put holes in our bug’s tires?”

“Yes, he was. It was after school and your daddy caught him doing it.” Now she hesitated again, but

there was no question of evasion now; it was reduced to tell the truth or tell a lie.

~~“Your daddy . . . sometimes he does things he’s sorry for later. Sometimes he doesn’t think the way he should. That doesn’t happen very often, but sometimes it does.”~~

“Did he hurt George Haffield like the time I spilled all his papers?”

Sometimes—

(Danny with his arm in a cast)

—he does things he’s sorry for later.

Wendy blinked her eyes savagely hard, driving her tears all the way back.

“Something like that, honey. Your daddy hit George to make him stop cutting the tires and George hit his head. Then the men who are in charge of the school said that George couldn’t go there anymore and your daddy couldn’t teach there anymore.” She stopped, out of words, and waited in dread for the deluge of questions.

“Oh,” Danny said, and went back to looking up the street. Apparently the subject was closed. If only it could be closed that easily for her—

She stood up. “I’m going upstairs for a cup of tea, doc. Want a couple of cookies and a glass of milk?”

“I think I’ll watch for Dad.”

“I don’t think he’ll be home much before five.”

“Maybe he’ll be early.”

“Maybe,” she agreed. “Maybe he will.”

She was halfway up the walk when he called, “Mommy?”

“What, Danny?”

“Do you want to go and live in that hotel for the winter?”

Now, which of five thousand answers should she give to that one? The way she had felt yesterday or last night or this morning? They were all different, they crossed the spectrum from rosy pink to deep black.

She said: “If it’s what your father wants, it’s what I want.” She paused. “What about you?”

“I guess I do,” he said finally. “Nobody much to play with around here.”

“You miss your friends, don’t you?”

“Sometimes I miss Scott and Andy. That’s about all.”

She went back to him and kissed him, ruffled his light-colored hair that was just losing its baby-fineness. He was such a solemn little boy, and sometimes she wondered just how he was supposed to survive with her and Jack for parents. The high hopes they had begun with came down to this unpleasant apartment building in a city they didn’t know. The image of Danny in his cast rose up before her again. Somebody in the Divine Placement Service had made a mistake, one she sometimes feared could never be corrected and which only the most innocent bystander could pay for.

“Stay out of the road, doc,” she said, and hugged him tight.

“Sure, Mom.”

She went upstairs and into the kitchen. She put on the teapot and laid a couple of Oreos on a plate for Danny in case he decided to come up while she was lying down. Sitting at the table with her blue pottery cup in front of her, she looked out the window at him, still sitting on the curb in his bluejeans and his oversized dark green Stovington Prep sweatshirt, the glider now lying beside him. The tea which had threatened all day now came in a cloudburst and she leaned into the fragrant, curling steam of the tea and wept. In grief and loss for the past, and terror of the future.

WATSON

You lost your temper, Ullman had said.

“Okay, here’s your furnace,” Watson said, turning on a light in the dark, musty-smelling room. He was a beefy man with fluffy popcorn hair, white shirt, and dark green chinos. He swung open a small square grating in the furnace’s belly and he and Jack peered in together. “This here’s the pilot light. A steady blue-white jet hissing steadily upward channeled destructive force, but the key word, Jack thought was *destructive* and not *channeled*: if you stuck your hand in there, the barbecue would happen in three quick seconds.

Lost your temper.

(Danny, are you all right?)

The furnace filled the entire room, by far the biggest and oldest Jack had ever seen.

“The pilot’s got a fail-safe,” Watson told him. “Little sensor in there measures heat. If the heat falls below a certain point, it sets off a buzzer in your quarters. Boiler’s on the other side of the wall. I’ll take you around.” He slammed the grating shut and led Jack behind the iron bulk of the furnace toward another door. The iron radiated a stuporous heat at them, and for some reason Jack thought of a large dozing cat. Watson jingled his keys and whistled.

Lost your—

(When he went back into his study and saw Danny standing there, wearing nothing but his training pants and a grin, a slow, red cloud of rage had eclipsed Jack’s reason. It had seemed slow subjectively, inside his head, but it must have all happened in less than a minute. It only seemed slow the way some dreams seem slow. The bad ones. Every door and drawer in his study seemed to have been ransacked in the time he had been gone. Closet, cupboards, the sliding bookcase. Every desk drawer yanked open to the stop. His manuscript, the three-act play he had been slowly developing from a novelette he had written seven years ago as an undergraduate, was scattered all over the floor. He had been drinking beer and doing the Act II corrections when Wendy said the phone was for him, and Danny had poured the can of beer all over the pages. Probably to see it foam. *See it foam, see it foam*, the words played over and over in his mind like a single sick chord on an out-of-tune piano, completing the circuit of his rage. He stepped deliberately toward his three-year-old son, who was looking up at him with the pleased grin, his pleasure at the job of work so successfully and recently completed in Daddy’s study. Danny began to say something and that was when he had grabbed Danny’s hand and bent it to make him drop the typewriter eraser and the mechanical pencil he was clenching in it. Danny had cried out little . . . no . . . no . . . tell the truth . . . he screamed. It was all hard to remember through the fog of anger, the sick single thump of that one Spike Jones chord. Wendy somewhere, asking what was wrong. Her voice faint, damped by the inner mist. This was between the two of them. He had whirled Danny around to spank him, his big adult fingers digging into the scant meat of the boy’s forearm, meeting around it in a closed fist, and the snap of the breaking bone had not been loud, not loud but had been *very* loud, *HUGE*, but not loud. Just enough of a sound to slit through the red fog like an arrow—but instead of letting in sunlight, that sound let in the dark clouds of shame and remorse, the

terror, the agonizing convulsion of the spirit. A clean sound with the past on one side of it and all the future on the other, a sound like a breaking pencil lead or a small piece of kindling when you brought it down over your knee. A moment of utter silence on the other side, in respect to the beginning future maybe, all the rest of his life. Seeing Danny's face drain of color until it was like cheese, seeing his eyes, always large, grow larger still, and glassy, Jack sure the boy was going to faint dead away into the puddle of beer and papers; his own voice, weak and drunk, slurry, trying to take it all back, to find a way around that not too loud sound of bone cracking and into the past—is there a status quo in the house?—saying: *Danny, are you all right?* Danny's answering shriek, then Wendy's shocked gasp as she came around them and saw the peculiar angle Danny's forearm had to his elbow; no arm was meant to hang quite that way in a world of normal families. Her own scream as she swept him into her arms, and a nonsense babble: *Oh God Danny oh dear God oh sweet God your poor sweet arm;* and Jack was standing there, stunned and stupid, trying to understand how a thing like this could have happened. He was standing there and his eyes met the eyes of his wife and he saw that Wendy hated him. It did not occur to him what the hate might mean in practical terms; it was only later that he realized she might have left him that night, gone to a motel, gotten a divorce lawyer in the morning; called the police. He saw only that his wife hated him and he felt staggered by it, all alone. He felt awful. This was what oncoming death felt like. Then she fled for the telephone and dialed the hospital with their screaming boy wedged in the crook of her arm and Jack did not go after her, he only stood in the ruins of his office, smelling beer and thinking—)

You lost your temper.

He rubbed his hand harshly across his lips and followed Watson into the boiler room. It was humid in here, but it was more than the humidity that brought the sick and slimy sweat onto his brow and stomach and legs. The remembering did that, it was a total thing that made that night two years ago seem like two hours ago. There was no lag. It brought the shame and revulsion back, the sense of having no worth at all, and that feeling always made him want to have a drink, and the wanting of a drink brought still blacker despair—would he ever have an hour, not a week or even a day, mind you, but just one waking hour when the craving for a drink wouldn't surprise him like this?

"The boiler," Watson announced. He pulled a red and blue bandanna from his back pocket, blew his nose with a decisive honk, and thrust it back out of sight after a short peek into it to see if he had gotten anything interesting.

The boiler stood on four cement blocks, a long and cylindrical metal tank, copper-jacketed and often patched. It squatted beneath a confusion of pipes and ducts which zigzagged upward into the high, cobweb-festooned basement ceiling. To Jack's right, two large heating pipes came through the wall from the furnace in the adjoining room.

"Pressure gauge is here." Watson tapped it. "Pounds per square inch, psi. I guess you'd know that. Got her up to a hundred now, and the rooms get a little chilly at night. Few guests complain, what the fuck. They're crazy to come up here in September anyway. Besides, this is an old baby. Got more patches on her than a pair of welfare overalls." Out came the bandanna. A honk. A peek. Back it went.

"I got me a fuckin cold," Watson said conversationally. "I get one every September. I be tinkering down here with this old whore, then I be out cuttin the grass or rakin that roque court. Get a chill and catch a cold, my old mum used to say. God bless her, she been dead six year. The cancer got her. Once the cancer gets you, you might as well make your will.

"You'll want to keep your press up to no more than fifty, maybe sixty. Mr. Ullman, he says to heat the west wing one day, central wing the next, east wing the day after that. Ain't he a crazyman? I hate that little fucker. Yap-yap-yap, all the livelong day, he's just like one of those little dogs that bites you

on the ankle then run around an pee all over the rug. If brains was black powder he couldn't blow his own nose. It's a pity the things you see when you ain't got a gun.

"Look here. You open an close these ducks by pullin these rings. I got em all marked for you. The blue tags all go to the rooms in the east wing. Red tags is the middle. Yellow is the west wing. When you go to heat the west wing, you got to remember that's the side of the hotel that really catches the weather. When it whoops, those rooms get as cold as a frigid woman with an ice cube up her work. You can run your press all the way to eighty on west wing days. I would, anyway."

"The thermostats upstairs—" Jack began.

Watson shook his head vehemently, making his fluffy hair bounce on his skull. "They ain't hooked up. They're just there for show. Some of these people from California, they don't think things is right unless they got it hot enough to grow a palm tree in their fuckin bedroom. All the heat comes from down here. Got to watch the press, though. See her creep?"

He tapped the main dial, which had crept from a hundred pounds per square inch to a hundred and two as Watson soliloquized. Jack felt a sudden shiver cross his back in a hurry and thought: *The good just walked over my grave*. Then Watson gave the pressure wheel a spin and dumped the boiler off. There was a great hissing, and the needle dropped back to ninety-one. Watson twisted the valve shut and the hissing died reluctantly.

"She creeps," Watson said. "You tell that fat little peckerwood Ullman, he drags out the account books and spends three hours showing how we can't afford a new one until 1982. I tell you, this whole place is gonna go sky-high someday, and I just hope that fat fuck's here to ride the rocket. God, I wish I could be as charitable as my mother was. She could see the good in everyone. Me, I'm just as mean as a snake with the shingles. What the fuck, a man can't help his nature."

"Now you got to remember to come down here twice a day and once at night before you rack in. You got to check the press. If you forget, it'll just creep and creep and like as not you an your fambly'll wake up on the fuckin moon. You just dump her off a little and you'll have no trouble."

"What's top end?"

"Oh, she's rated for two-fifty, but she'd blow long before that now. You couldn't get me to come down an stand next to her when that dial was up to one hundred and eighty."

"There's no automatic shutdown?"

"No, there ain't. This was built before such things were required. Federal government's in for everything these days, ain't it? FBI openin mail, CIA buggin the goddam phones . . . and look what happened to that Nixon. Wasn't that a sorry sight?"

"But if you just come down here regular an check the press, you'll be fine. An remember to switch those ducks around like he wants. Won't none of the rooms get much above forty-five unless we have an amazin warm winter. And you'll have your own apartment just as warm as you like it."

"What about the plumbing?"

"Okay, I was just getting to that. Over here through this arch."

They walked into a long, rectangular room that seemed to stretch for miles. Watson pulled a cord and a single seventy-five-watt bulb cast a sickish, swinging glow over the area they were standing in. Straight ahead was the bottom of the elevator shaft, heavy greased cables descending to pulleys twenty feet in diameter and a huge, grease-clogged motor. Newspapers were everywhere, bundled and banded and boxed. Other cartons were marked *Records* or *Invoices* or *Receipts*—SAVE! The smell was yellow and moldy. Some of the cartons were falling apart, spilling yellow flimsy sheets that might have been twenty years old out onto the floor. Jack stared around, fascinated. The Overlook's entire history might be here, buried in these rotting cartons.

“That elevator’s a bitch to keep runnin,” Watson said, jerking his thumb at it. “I know Ullman buying the state elevator inspector a few fancy dinners to keep the repairman away from that fucker.”

“Now, here’s your central plumbin core.” In front of them five large pipes, each of them wrapped in insulation and cinched with steel bands, rose into the shadows and out of sight.

Watson pointed to a cobwebby shelf beside the utility shaft. There were a number of greasy rags on it, and a loose-leaf binder. “That there is all your plumbin schematics,” he said. “I don’t think you’ll have any trouble with leaks—never has been—but sometimes the pipes freeze up. Only way to stop that is to run the faucets a little bit durin the nights, but there’s over four hundred taps in this fuckin palace. That fat fairy upstairs would scream all the way to Denver when he saw the water bill. Ain’t that right?”

“I’d say that’s a remarkably astute analysis.”

Watson looked at him admiringly. “Say, you really are a college fella, aren’t you? Talk just like a book. I admire that, as long as the fella ain’t one of those fairy-boys. Lots of em are. You know who stirred up all those college riots a few years ago? The hommasexshuls, that’s who. They get frustrated an have to cut loose. Comin out of the closet, they call it. Holy shit, I don’t know what the world comin to.

“Now, if she freezes, she most likely gonna freeze right up in this shaft. No heat, you see. If it happens, use this.” He reached into a broken orange crate and produced a small gas torch.

“You just unstrap the insulation when you find the ice plug and put the heat right to her. Get it?”

“Yes. But what if a pipe freezes outside the utility core?”

“That won’t happen if you’re doin your job and keepin the place heated. You can’t get to the other pipes anyway. Don’t you fret about it. You’ll have no trouble. Beastly place down here. Cobwebby. Gives me the horrors, it does.”

“Ullman said the first winter caretaker killed his family and himself.”

“Yeah, that guy Grady. He was a bad actor, I knew that the minute I saw him. Always grinnin like an egg-suck dog. That was when they were just startin out here and that fat fuck Ullman, he would’ve hired the Boston Strangler if he’d’ve worked for minimum wage. Was a ranger from the National Park that found em; the phone was out. All of em up in the west wing on the third floor, froze solid. Too bad about the little girls. Eight and six, they was. Cute as cut-buttons. Oh, that was a hell of a mess. That Ullman, he manages some honky-tonky resort place down in Florida in the off-season, and he caught a plane up to Denver and hired a sleigh to take him up here from Sidewinder because the roads were closed—a *sleigh*, can you believe that? He about split a gut tryin to keep it out of the papers. Did pretty well, I got to give him that. There was an item in the *Denver Post*, and of course the bituary in that pissant little rag they have down in Estes Park, but that was just about all. Pretty good, considerin the reputation this place has got. I expected some reporter would dig it all up again and just sorta put Grady in it as an excuse to rake over the scandals.”

“What scandals?”

Watson shrugged. “Any big hotels have got scandals,” he said. “Just like every big hotel has got a ghost. Why? Hell, people come and go. Sometimes one of em will pop off in his room, heart attack or stroke or something like that. Hotels are superstitious places. No thirteenth floor or room thirteen, no mirrors on the back of the door you come in through, stuff like that. Why, we lost a lady just this last July. Ullman had to take care of that, and you can bet your ass he did. That’s what they pay him twenty-two thousand bucks a season for, and as much as I dislike the little prick, he earns it. It’s like some people just come here to throw up and they hire a guy like Ullman to clean up the mess. Here’s this woman, must be sixty fuckin years old—my age!—and her hair’s dyed just as red as

whore's spotlight, tits saggin just about down to her belly button on account of she ain't wearin no brassie-ear, big varycoarse veins all up and down her legs so they look like a couple of goddam roadmaps, the jools drippin off her neck and arms an hangin out her ears. And she's got this kid with her, he can't be no more than seventeen, with hair down to his asshole and his crotch bulgin like he stuffed it up with the funnypages. So they're here a week, ten days maybe, and every night it's the same drill. Down in the Colorado Lounge from five to seven, her suckin up singapore slings like they're gonna outlaw em tomorrow and him with just the one bottle of Olympia, suckin it, makin it last. And she'd be makin jokes and sayin all these witty things, and every time she said one he'd grin just like a fuckin ape, like she had strings tied to the corners of his mouth. Only after a few days you could see it was gettin harder an harder for him to grin, and God knows what he had to think about to get his pump primed by bedtime. Well, they'd go in for dinner, him walkin and her staggerin, drunk as a coot, you know, and he'd be pinchin the waitresses and grinnin at em when she wasn't lookin. He'd even had bets on how long he'd last."

Watson shrugged.

"Then he comes down one night around ten, sayin his 'wife' is 'indisposed'—which meant she was passed out again like every other night they was there—and he's goin to get her some stomach medicine. So off he goes in the little Porsche they come in, and that's the last we see of him. Next morning she comes down and tries to put on this big act, but all day she's gettin paler an paler, and Mr. Ullman asks her, sorta diplomatic-like, would she like him to notify the state cops, just in case maybe he had a little accident or something. She's on him like a cat. No-no-no, he's a fine driver, she isn't worried, everything's under control, he'll be back for dinner. So that afternoon she steps into the Colorado around three and never has no dinner at all. She goes up to her room around ten-thirty, and that's the last time anybody saw her alive."

"What happened?"

"County coroner said she took about thirty sleepin pills on top of all the booze. Her husband showed up the next day, some bigshot lawyer from New York. He gave old Ullman four different shades of holy hell. I'll sue this an I'll sue that an when I'm through you won't even be able to find a clean pair of underwear, stuff like that. But Ullman's good, the sucker. Ullman got him quieted down. Probably asked that bigshot how he'd like to see his wife splashed all over the New York papers: Wife of Prominent New York Blah Blah Found Dead With Bellyful of Sleeping Pills. After playing hide-the-salami with a kid young enough to be her grandson.

"The state cops found the Porsche in back of this all-night burger joint down in Lyons, and Ullman pulled a few strings to get it released to that lawyer. Then both of them ganged up on old Archer Houghton, which is the county coroner, and got him to change the verdict to accidental death. Heart attack. Now ole Archer's driving a Chrysler. I don't begrudge him. A man's got to take it where he finds it, especially when he starts gettin along in years."

Out came the bandanna. Honk. Peek. Out of sight.

"So what happens? About a week later this stupid cunt of a chambermaid, Delores Vickery by name, she gives out with a helluva shriek while she's makin up the room where those two stayed, and she faints dead away. When she comes to she says she seen the dead woman in the bathroom, layin naked in the tub. 'Her face was all purple an puffy,' she says, 'an she was grinnin at me.' So Ullman gave her two weeks' worth of walking papers and told her to get lost. I figure there's maybe forty-fifty people died in this hotel since my grandfather opened it for business in 1910."

He looked shrewdly at Jack.

"You know how most of em go? Heart attack or stroke, while they're bangin the lady they're with."

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