

**A BEDROOM IN THE WEE HOURS OF THE
MORNING**

Stephen King

(from Scene 2 in Before the Play)

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 wise was what some might have called it. Others, more honest, might have called it the sleep of the monumentally' stupid.

He was William Pillsbury of the Westchester Pillsbury's 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 nouveau riche, but either way they had money falling out of their assholes. If she ever said that aloud to Bill, he would undoubtedly go pale and might even faint dead away. No fear, Bill.

Profanation of the Pillsbury family shall never cross my lips.

It had been her idea to honeymoon at the Overlook in Colorado, and there had been two reasons for this. First, although it was tremendously expensive (as the best resorts were), it was not a "hep" place to go, and Lottie did not like to go to the hep places.

Where did you go on your honeymoon, Lottie? Oh, this perfectly wonderful resort hotel in Colorado — the Overlook. Lovely place.

Quite out of the way but so romantic. And her friends — whose stupidity was exceeded in most cases only by that of William

Pillsbury himself — would look at her in dumb — literally! — wonder.

Lottie had done it again.

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

Lottie smiled a little in the dark 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 rumbled 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 corpsehue, 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 corner 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 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.