

**Arthur
Hailey**

Hotel

Arthur Hailey --- Hotel



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The People of HOTEL

Warren Trent

The St. Gregory's aristocratic, irascible owner.

Peter McDermott

The hotel's handsome general manager
who was still haunted by the sins of his youth.

Marsha Preyscott

The teenage New Orleans heiress
who wanted to make life an endless dream.

Curtis O'Keefe

The tough, fun-loving tycoon
who schemed to buy the St. Gregory for a song.

Duke of Croydon

The internationally famous
statesman who hid behind the
skirts of his arrogant, ice-maiden wife.

and

Keycase Milne

The oddly lovable thief
whose fumbling misadventures provided
the catalyst that brought them all together.

HOTEL

"A RIP-SNORTING STORY."

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in Luton, England, in 1920, ARTHUR HAILEY was educated in English schools until age fourteen. After a brief career as an office boy, he joined the British Royal Air Force in 1939 and served through World War II, rising through the ranks to become a pilot and flight lieutenant. In 1947 Mr. Hailey emigrated to Canada, where he was successively a real estate salesman, business paper editor and a sales and advertising executive. He became, and still is, a Canadian citizen. In 1956 Arthur Hailey scored his first writing success with a TV drama, "Flight into Danger," which later became a motion picture and a novel, *Runway Zero-Eight*. Since then, as a novelist and one of the great storytellers of our time, he has acquired a worldwide following of devoted readers and his books are published in twenty languages. The sensational Hailey bestsellers include: *Hotel*, *Airport*, *Wheels*, *The Final Diagnosis*, *In High Places*, *The Moneychangers*, and *Overload*. Arthur Hailey and his wife, Sheila, make their home at Lyford Cay in the Bahamas. Their children are Jane, Steven and Diane.

*Traveller, pray lodge in this unworthy house.
The bath is ready. A peaceful room awaits
you. Come in! Come in!*

—Translation of a sign at the door-
way of an inn, Takamatsu, Japan.

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MONDAY EVENING

1

If he had had his way, Peter McDermott thought, he would have fired the chief house detective long ago. But he had not had his way and now, once more, the obese ex-policeman was missing when he was needed most.

McDermott leaned down from his husky six-and-a-half feet and jiggled the desk telephone impatiently. "Fifteen things break loose at once," he told the girl by the window of the wide, broadloomed office, "and nobody can find him."

Christine Francis glanced at her wrist watch. It showed a few minutes before eleven P.M. "There's a bar on Baronne Street you might try."

Peter McDermott nodded. "The switchboard's checking Ogilvie's hangouts." He opened a desk drawer, took out cigarettes and offered them to Christine.

Coming forward, she accepted a cigarette and McDermott lit it, then did the same for himself. He watched as she inhaled.

Christine Francis had left her own smaller office in the St. Gregory Hotel executive suite a few minutes earlier. She had been working late and was on the point of going home when the light under the assistant general manager's door had drawn her in.

"Our Mr. Ogilvie makes his own rules," Christine said. "It's always been that way. On W.T.'s orders."

McDermott spoke briefly into the telephone, then waited again. "You're right," he acknowledged. "I tried to reor-

ganize our tame detective force once, and my ears were properly pinned back."

She said quietly, "I didn't know that."

He looked at her quizzically. "I thought you knew everything."

And usually she did. As personal assistant to Warren Trent, the unpredictable and irascible owner of New Orleans' largest hotel, Christine was privy to the hotel's inner secrets as well as its day-to-day affairs. She knew, for example, that Peter, who had been promoted to assistant general manager a month or two ago, was virtually running the big, bustling St. Gregory, though at an ungenerous salary and with limited authority. She knew the reasons behind that, too, which were in a file marked *Confidential* and involved Peter McDermott's personal life.

Christine asked, "What is breaking loose?"

McDermott gave a cheerful grin which contorted his rugged, almost ugly features. "We've a complaint from the eleventh floor about some sort of sex orgy; on the ninth the Duchess of Croydon claims her Duke has been insulted by a room-service waiter; there's a report of somebody moaning horribly in 1439; and I've the night manager off sick, with the other two house officers otherwise engaged."

He spoke into the telephone again and Christine returned to the office window which was on the main mezzanine floor. Head tilted back to keep the cigarette smoke from her eyes, she looked casually across the city. Directly ahead, through an avenue of space between adjoining buildings, she could see into the tight, crowded rectangle of the French Quarter. With midnight an hour away, it was early yet for the Quarter, and lights in front of late night bars, bistros, jazz halls, and strip joints—as well as behind darkened shutters—would burn well into tomorrow morning.

Somewhere to the north, over Lake Pontchartrain probably, a summer storm was brewing in the darkness. The beginnings of it could be sensed in muted rumblings and an occasional flash of light. With luck, if the storm moved south toward the Gulf of Mexico, there might be rain in New Orleans by morning.

The rain would be welcome, Christine thought. For three

weeks the city had sweltered in heat and humidity, producing tensions all around. There would be relief in the hotel too. This afternoon the chief engineer had complained again, "If I canna' shut down part of the air conditioning soon, I willna' be responsible for my bearings."

Peter McDermott put down the telephone and she asked, "Do you have a name for the room where the moaning is?"

He shook his head and lifted the phone again. "I'll find out. Probably someone having a nightmare, but we'd better make sure."

As she dropped into an upholstered leather chair facing the big mahogany desk, Christine realized suddenly how very tired she was. In the ordinary way she would have been home at her Gentilly apartment hours ago. But today had been exceptionally full, with two conventions moving in and a heavy influx of other guests, creating problems, many of which had found their way to her desk.

"All right, thanks." McDermott scribbled a name and hung up. "Albert Wells, Montreal."

"I know him," Christine said. "A nice little man who stays here every year. If you like, I'll check that one out."

He hesitated, eying Christine's slight, trim figure.

The telephone shrilled and he answered it. "I'm sorry, sir," the operator said, "we can't locate Mr. Ogilvie."

"Never mind. Give me the bell captain." Even if he couldn't fire the chief house detective, McDermott thought, he would do some hell raising in the morning. Meanwhile he would send someone else to look after the disturbance on the eleventh and handle the Duke and Duchess incident himself.

"Bell captain," the phone said, and he recognized the flat nasal voice of Herbie Chandler. Chandler, like Ogilvie, was another of the St. Gregory's old-timers and reputedly controlled more sideline rackets than anyone else on staff.

McDermott explained the problem and asked Chandler to investigate the complaint about an alleged sex orgy. As he had half expected, there was an immediate protest. "That ain't my job, Mr. Mac, and we're still busy down here." The tone was typical Chandler—half fawning, half insolent.

McDermott instructed, "Never mind the argument, I

want that complaint attended to." Making another decision: "And something else: send a boy with a pass key to meet Miss Francis on the main mezzanine." He replaced the phone before there could be any more discussion.

"Let's go." His hand touched Christine's shoulders lightly. "Take the bellboy with you, and tell your friend to have his nightmares under the covers."

2

Herbie Chandler, his weasel-face betraying an inner uneasiness, stood thoughtfully by the bell captain's upright desk in the St. Gregory lobby.

Set centrally, beside one of the fluted concrete columns which extended to the heavily ornamented ceiling high above, the bell captain's post commanded a view of the lobby's comings and goings. There was plenty of movement now. The conventioners had been in and out all evening and, as the hours wore on, their determined gaiety had increased with their liquor intake.

As Chandler watched out of habit, a group of noisy revelers came through the Carondelet Street door: three men and two women; they held drinking glasses, the kind that Pat O'Brien's bar charged tourists a dollar for over in the French Quarter, and one of the men was stumbling badly, supported by the others. All three men wore convention name tags. GOLD CROWN COLA the cards said, with their names beneath. Others in the lobby made way good-naturedly and the quintet weaved into the main floor bar.

Occasional new arrivals were still trickling in—from late planes and trains, and several were being roomed now by Chandler's platoon of bellboys, though the "boys" was a figure of speech since none was younger than forty, and several graying veterans had been with the hotel a quarter century or more. Herbie Chandler, who held the power of hiring and firing his bell staff, preferred older men. Someone who had to struggle and grunt a bit with heavy luggage was likely to earn bigger tips than a youngster who swung bags as if they contained nothing more than balsa wood.

One old-timer, who actually was strong and wiry as a mule, had a way of setting bags down, putting a hand over his heart, then picking them up with a shake of his head and carrying on. The performance seldom earned less than a dollar from conscience-stricken guests who were convinced the old man would have a coronary around the next corner. What they did not know was that ten per cent of their tip would find its way into Herbie Chandler's pocket, plus the flat two dollars daily which Chandler exacted from each bellboy as the price of retaining his job.

The bell captain's private toll system caused plenty of low-toned growlings, even though a fast-moving bellboy could still make a hundred and fifty dollars a week for himself when the hotel was full. On such occasions, as tonight, Herbie Chandler often stayed at his post well beyond the usual hour. Trusting no one, he liked to keep an eye on his percentage and had an uncanny knack of sizing up guests, estimating exactly what each trip to the upstairs floors would yield. In the past a few individualists had tried holding out on Herbie by reporting tips to be less than they really were. Reprisals were unfailingly swift and ruthless, and a month's suspension on some trumped-up charge usually brought non-conformists into line.

There was another cause, too, for Chandler's presence in the hotel tonight, and it accounted for his unease which had been steadily growing since Peter McDermott's telephone call a few minutes earlier. McDermott had instructed: investigate a complaint on the eleventh floor. But Herbie Chandler had no need to investigate because he knew roughly what was happening on the eleventh. The reason was simple: he had arranged it himself.

Three hours earlier the two youths had been explicit in their request and he had listened respectfully since the fathers of both were wealthy local citizens and frequent guests of the hotel. "Listen, Herbie," one of them said, "there's a fraternity dance tonight—the same old crap, and we'd like something different."

He had asked, knowing the answer, "How different?"

"We've taken a suite." The boy flushed. "We want a couple of girls."

It was too risky, Herbie decided at once. Both were little

more than boys, and he suspected they had been drinking. He began, "Sorry, gentlemen," when the second youth cut in.

"Don't give us any crap about not being able to, because we know you run the call girls here."

Herbie had bared his weasel teeth in what passed for a smile. "I can't imagine where you got that idea, Mr. Dixon."

The one who had spoken first insisted, "We can pay, Herbie. You know that."

The bell captain hesitated, despite his doubts his mind working greedily. Just lately his sideline revenues had been slower than usual. Perhaps, after all, the risk was slight.

The one named Dixon said, "Let's quit horsing around. How much?"

Herbie looked at the youths, remembered their fathers, and multiplied the standard rate by two. "A hundred dollars."

There was a momentary pause. Then Dixon said decisively, "You got a deal." He added persuasively to his companion, "Listen we've already paid for the booze. I'll lend you the rest of your split."

"Well . . ."

"In advance, gentlemen." Herbie moistened his thin lips with his tongue. "Just one other thing. You'll have to make sure there's no noise. If there is, and we get complaints, there could be trouble for all of us."

There would be no noise, they had assured him, but now, it seemed, there had been, and his original fears were proving uncomfortably true.

An hour ago the girls had come in through the front entrance as usual, with only an inner few of the hotel's staff aware that they were other than registered hotel guests. If all had gone well, both should have left by now, as unobtrusively as they had come.

The eleventh floor complaint, relayed through McDermott and specifically referring to a sex orgy, meant that something had gone seriously wrong. What? Herbie was reminded uncomfortably of the reference to booze.

It was hot and humid in the lobby despite the over-worked air conditioning, and Herbie took out a silk hand-

kerchief to mop his perspiring forehead. At the same time he silently cursed his own folly, wondering whether, at this stage, he should go upstairs or stay well away.

Peter McDermott rode the elevator to the ninth floor, leaving Christine who was to continue to the fourteenth with her accompanying bellboy. At the opened elevator doorway he hesitated. "Send for me if there's any trouble."

"If it's essential I'll scream." As the sliding doors came between them her eyes met his own. For a moment he stood thoughtfully watching the place where they had been, then, long legged and alert, strode down the carpeted corridor toward the Presidential Suite.

The St. Gregory's largest and most elaborate suite—known familiarly as the brasshouse—had, in its time, housed a succession of distinguished guests, including presidents and royalty. Most had liked New Orleans because after an initial welcome the city had a way of respecting its visitors' privacy, including indiscretions, if any. Somewhat less than heads of state, though distinguished in their way, were the suite's present tenants, the Duke and Duchess of Croydon, plus their retinue of secretary, the Duchess's maid, and five Bedlington terriers.

Outside the double padded leather doors, decorated with gold fleur-de-lis, Peter McDermott depressed a mother-of-pearl button and heard a muted buzz inside, followed by a less muted chorus of barkings. Waiting, he reflected on what he had heard and knew about the Croydons.

The Duke of Croydon, scion of an ancient family, had adapted himself to the times with an instinct for the common touch. Within the past decade, and aided by his Duchess—herself a known public figure and cousin of the Queen—he had become ambassador-at-large and successful troubleshooter for the British government. More recently, however, there had been rumors that the Duke's career had reached a critical point, perhaps because his touch had become a shade too common in some areas, notably those of liquor and other men's wives. There were

other reports, though, which said the shadow over the Duke was minor and temporary, and that the Duchess had the situation well in hand. Supporting this second view were predictions that the Duke of Croydon might soon be named British Ambassador to Washington.

From behind Peter a voice murmured, "Excuse me, Mr. McDermott, can I have a word with you?"

Turning abruptly he recognized Sol Natchez, one of the elderly room-service waiters, who had come quietly down the corridor, a lean cadaverous figure in a short white coat, trimmed with the hotel's colors of red and gold. The man's hair was slicked down flatly and combed forward into an old-fashioned forelock. His eyes were pale and rheumy, and the veins in the back of his hands, which he rubbed nervously, stood out like cords with the flesh sunk deep between them.

"What is it, Sol?"

His voice betraying agitation, the waiter said, "I expect you've come about the complaint—the complaint about me."

McDermott glanced at the double doors. They had not yet opened, nor, apart from the barking, had there been any other sound from within. He said, "Tell me what happened."

The other swallowed twice. Ignoring the question, he said in a pleading hurried whisper, "If I lose this job, Mr. McDermott, it's hard at my age to find another." He looked toward the Presidential Suite, his expression a mixture of anxiety and resentment. "They're not the hardest people to serve . . . except for tonight. They expect a lot, but I've never minded, even though there's never a tip."

Peter smiled involuntarily. British nobility seldom tipped, assuming perhaps that the privilege of waiting on them was a reward in itself.

He interjected, "You still haven't told me . . ."

"I'm gettin' to it, Mr. McDermott." From someone old enough to be Peter's grandfather, the other man's distress was almost embarrassing. "It was about half an hour ago. They'd ordered a late supper, the Duke and Duchess—oysters, champagne, shrimp Creole."

"Never mind the menu. What happened?"

"It was the shrimp Creole, sir. When I was serving it . . . well, it's something, in all these years it's happened very rarely."

"For heaven's sake!" Peter had one eye on the suite doors, ready to break off the conversation the moment they opened.

"Yes, Mr. McDermott. Well, when I was serving the Creole the Duchess got up from the table and as she came back she jogged my arm. If I didn't know better I'd have said it was deliberate."

"That's ridiculous!"

"I know, sir, I know. But what happened, you see, was there was a small spot—I swear it was no more than a quarter inch—on the Duke's trousers."

Peter said doubtfully, "Is that *all* this is about?"

"Mr. McDermott, I swear to you that's all. But you'd think—the fuss the Duchess made—I'd committed murder. I apologized, I got a clean napkin and water to get the spot off, but it wouldn't do. She insisted on sending for Mr. Trent . . ."

"Mr. Trent is not in the hotel."

He would hear the other side of the story, Peter decided, before making any judgment. Meanwhile he instructed, "If you're all through for tonight you'd better go home. Report tomorrow and you'll be told what will happen."

As the waiter disappeared, Peter McDermott depressed the bell push again. There was barely time for the barking to resume before the door was opened by a moon-faced, youngish man with pince-nez. Peter recognized him as the Croydons' secretary.

Before either of them could speak a woman's voice called out from the suite's interior. "Whoever it is, tell them not to *keep* buzzing." For all the peremptory tone, Peter thought, it was an attractive voice with a rich huskiness which excited interest.

"I beg your pardon," he told the secretary. "I thought perhaps you hadn't heard." He introduced himself, then added, "I understand there has been some trouble about our service. I came to see if I could help."

The secretary said, "We were expecting Mr. Trent."

"Mr. Trent is away from the hotel for the evening."

While speaking they had moved from the corridor into the hallway of the suite, a tastefully appointed rectangle with deep broadloom, two upholstered chairs, and a telephone side table beneath a Morris Henry Hobbs engraving of old New Orleans. The double doorway to the corridor formed one end of the rectangle. At the other end, the door to the large living room was partially open. On the right and left were two other doorways, one to the self-contained kitchen and another to an office-cum-bed-sitting room, at present used by the Croydons' secretary. The two main, connecting bedrooms of the suite were accessible both through the kitchen and living room, an arrangement contrived so that a surreptitious bedroom visitor could be spirited in and out by the kitchen if need arose.

"Why can't he be sent for?" The question was addressed without preliminary as the living-room door opened and the Duchess of Croydon appeared, three of the Bedlington terriers enthusiastically at her heels. With a swift finger-snap, instantly obeyed, she silenced the dogs and turned her eyes questioningly on Peter. He was aware of the handsome, high-cheekboned face, familiar through a thousand photographs. Even in casual clothes, he observed, the Duchess was superbly dressed.

"To be perfectly honest, Your Grace, I was not aware that you required Mr. Trent personally."

Gray-green eyes regarded him appraisingly. "Even in Mr. Trent's absence I should have expected one of the senior executives."

Despite himself, Peter flushed. There was a superb hauteur about the Duchess of Croydon which—in a perverse way—was curiously appealing. A picture flashed into his memory. He had seen it in one of the illustrated magazines—the Duchess putting a stallion at a high fence. Disdainful of risk, she had been securely and superbly in command. He had an impression, at this moment, of being on foot while the Duchess was mounted.

"I'm assistant general manager. That's why I came personally."

There was a glimmer of amusement in the eyes which held his own. "Aren't you somewhat young for that?"

"Not really. Nowadays a good many young men are