

M.D. Spencer

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THE THING IN ROOM 601

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**THE THING IN
ROOM 604**

M. D. Spenser



Plantation, Florida

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Chapter One

You should have ~~seen~~ this hotel!

Mom said it was very famous and very popular and everybody loved it. Maybe so.

I know it's popular with ghosts, because a bunch of them live there. And it was almost pretty popular with two corpses.

And those two corpses — that is, those two almost-corpses — were my sister Diane and me.

Let me tell you about it.

First of all, the hotel was in Santa Barbara. That's a city in California, about a hundred miles north of Los Angeles. It's right on the Pacific Ocean and it has a great beach.

The hotel was called the Hotel Marlowe. It was less than a block from the beach. You just went out the front door, turned to the right,

walked down the street, crossed the road, and you were there.

That's pretty convenient if you like the ocean, which I do.

Outside, the hotel was all white and it had five floors. Actually, it had six, but I'll get to that part in a minute.

They gave out a booklet that had an essay all about the hotel's history, along with some pictures of the hotel in different eras. In the old pictures, the city looked way different, but the hotel always looked the same.

I got a copy of the booklet from the front desk in the lobby and read it all. Every word. I like knowing about the places I visit.

The hotel turned out to be quite old. It was built in 1929, but it looked as if it were even older than that.

The booklet said it was built in the "Spanish-Moorish" style. That meant nothing to me. What I can tell you is that the Hotel Marlowe looked a little like a castle and a little like a fort.

It had archways and doors with rounded

tops, and big, wide windows and little, narrow windows. On the top, above the fifth floor, there were towers at the two corners in the front. And there were tall palm trees all around it.

Inside, it was weird. And creepy.

It looked as if somebody (went nuts) when they were building it.

It didn't have long, straight hallways like modern hotels. Instead, all the hallways bent and turned sharp corners. Other hallways were always branching off the hallway you were in.

Go down a hallway. Turn a corner. Turn another corner, and . . . right away, you were completely lost. Finding your way back to your room could be quite a challenge.

Some of the hallways just led to a dead end. And you were always going up or down two or three steps in those hallways.

The lighting in the hallways was not very good. In fact, they were pretty dark. Almost gloomy.

There was a creepy old wooden elevator that moved really, really slow. It made a loud,

rattling noise when it moved. It moaned and groaned all the time, as if it were in pain.

It always sounded like it was going to stop and die between floors and leave you stranded. I couldn't see any phone or button in there to call for help if it did get stuck, so that made me nervous.

My mom and dad said they had stayed at the Hotel Marlowe lots of times. They said they always stayed in different rooms, and no two rooms were the same.

It's neat. When we stepped inside, I saw how creepy-looking it was. I loved it.

Diane saw how creepy it was, too. She didn't like it very much. In fact, she hated it.

We got there with Mom on Wednesday night. A couple of minutes after we arrived, Diane and I were standing in the lobby, waiting for Mom. She was at the front desk, checking in and getting the key.

Diane and I looked around at the lobby. It had palm trees in huge pots on the floor and big, fat armchairs, and dim floor lamps and really dark

corners.

Diane came over close to me and put her mouth next to my ear.

"This place is weird," she whispered. "It gives me the creeps."

I knew what she meant. And I agreed. But she's my sister, and she's always complaining. So I laughed.

But I have to admit I didn't laugh when we saw the ghosts there. And I definitely wasn't laughing when we nearly got killed there.

I'll never forget the Hotel Marlowe as long as I live.

Chapter Two

Here's the reason we were there. We live in New York City.

My mother's sister, our Aunt Nancy, lives in California, in some little town that it takes ninety minutes to drive to from Santa Barbara. I can't remember the name of it, but I think it's something Spanish.

Aunt Nancy was getting married to some guy on the next Saturday. I can't remember his name, either.

Aunt Nancy was my mother's only sister, so the wedding was a big deal in the family. Of course, the whole family had to be there. That meant that Diane and I got three days off from school.

Here's the plan my parents made. Mom and Diane and I would fly to Santa Barbara on

Tuesday evening. The plane left New York at eight o'clock.

So Mom went to work that day. Diane and I went to school. After that, the three of us went to the airport.

Dad was really busy at work. He couldn't leave until Friday. That meant he'd get to Santa Barbara late Friday night.

It was a good deal for Diane and me. First of all, we had those three days off from school. Neither of us was complaining about that.

On Wednesday, Mom was going to take Diane and me all around to see things — you know, touristy things and historic sites, which I love a lot more than math class.

In the afternoon, we were going horseback riding. Then we were going to have dinner at a Mexican restaurant. On Thursday, Mom was going to go to see her sister.

She said she might go there on Friday, too. It depended on how much help her sister needed.

Mom knew Diane and I didn't want to go visit her sister for two days. Diane might have

wanted to go for one day, but I didn't want to go at all. Everybody was going to be all fluttery about the wedding, and people who didn't even know me would probably pinch my cheeks.

Mom thought we were old enough to stay at the hotel by ourselves during the day. Of course, she was right. Only, she wasn't sure she was right. She said she'd make up her mind when the time came.

And, of course, it partly depended on how Diane and I behaved.

Anyway, after Dad got there on Friday night, we would all go to the wedding on Saturday. Then we'd fly back to New York on Sunday.

That's the way it was all supposed to work. But only part of it turned out the way it was planned.

And the part that wasn't planned turned out pretty terrifying!

Chapter Three

So there we were at breakfast with Mom that Wednesday morning. Mom was talking about the wedding.

All I was thinking about was the great time I was going to have, especially if Mom left Diane and me on our own at the hotel for two whole days.

And I was thinking about riding a horse that afternoon. I love to go horseback riding and I'm good at it.

Diane rides too, but she's not as good as I am. I always thought she was a little afraid of the horses. Horses can sense when you're afraid, and they start to behave less well.

In other words, there was nothing special about breakfast — just eating and talking and thinking. A typical happy family, chatting and

eating toast and drinking large glasses of pulpy hotel orange juice.

If you had seen us then, you never would have thought anything bad could ever happen to us. We sure didn't.

But that breakfast was almost the last meal Diane and I ever ate!

Diane was eating toast and making a pig of herself. She likes jam on her toast — any kind of jam — but she always butters the toast first and then puts jam on the butter.

Gross!

I like orange marmalade on my toast. I'm glad I like it because Diane doesn't like it at all. She can't even stand to watch me eat it, which makes it all the more fun for me.

"Nice toast," I said to her.

She glanced across the table at my plate.

"Likewise, I'm sure," she said.

"Here, have some more butter and jam," I said. "By the time you're fifteen, you'll be as big as a house."

"Yeah," she said. "Right."

She took another big bite.)

"And when *you're* fifteen," she said, "you'll still be stupid."

I'm cursed by having a sister who's older than me. Diane is twelve. I'm twelve, too. But Diane is eleven months older.

I love my parents a lot, but I'll never give them for the way that worked out.

"You think you're so smart just because you're a year older," I said.

"You think you're so smart just because you're a boy," Diane said.

Mom was eating a slice of melon. Now she put her knife and fork down on the table firmly and deliberately. I knew from the way she did it that we were going to get another lecture.

"Listen, you two," Mom said. She put her hands flat on the table on either side of her plate and coffee cup. She looked first at me and then at Diane.

"I know something," she said. "I know that if the two of you can't stop this constant arguing, this trip is going to be very unpleasant. We

didn't come all the way from New York to California so I could listen to the same nonsense I hear at the table every morning. So cut it out."

We both mumbled, "Sorry, Mom."

I glanced across at Diane. She stuck half an inch of her tongue out at me. It looked really gross, because it had soggy toast crumbs all over it.

I ignored her. I just made a big deal out of enjoying my toast, and savoring my orange marmalade.

Nobody said much after that. When we finished breakfast, we went upstairs to our suite to get ready to go out for the day and see the sights.

Diane and I didn't have to do anything to get ready. We're just kids. We're always ready. Except for brushing our teeth, which we only do after Mom reminds us.

Mom just had to get her sunglasses and pocketbook. In just a few minutes, we were going to be on our way.

That's when the phone rang.

That telephone call did a lot. It changed

our plans. It was the reason Diane and I had to move out of the suite and into a different room. Moving to the other room was the reason we saw the ghosts.

Seeing the ghosts was the reason we almost got killed!

Chapter Four

I heard Mom say, “Carol!”

She sounded really surprised to hear from her. Carol is Mom’s best friend. They were roommates for three years in college. When they get together, they tell the same old college stories a lot. It’s pretty boring.

Then I heard Mom say, “Oh, no!”

Then she just listened for a minute. She looked really upset and worried.

“Where are they taking you?” she asked. Then she listened some more. While she was listening, she looked at Diane and me. It was that look adults have sometimes, when they look at you but don’t really see you.

That was a bad sign. A really bad sign.

Diane and I glanced at each other. I could see that she was thinking the same thing I was.