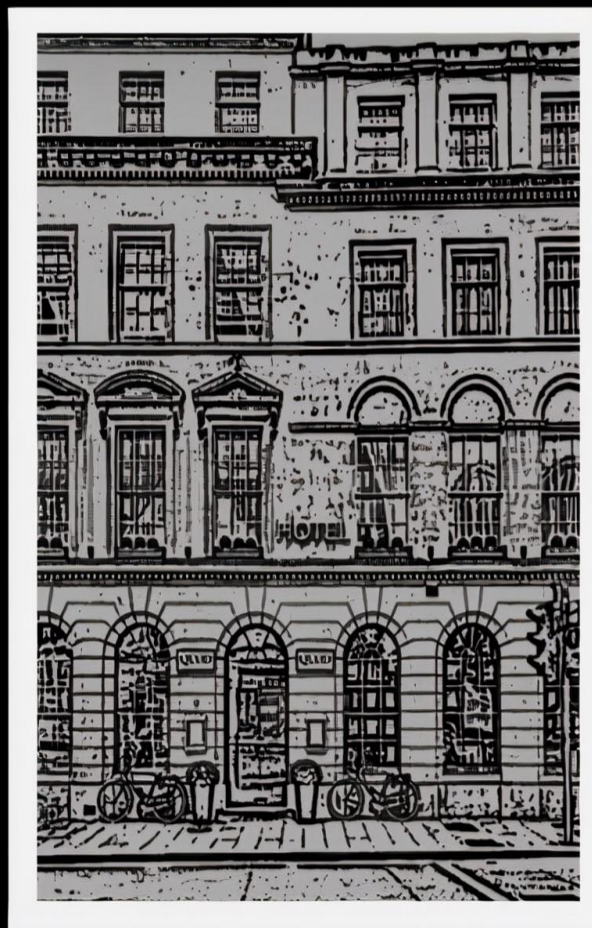


"Hotel Amorous, 1941"



By Charis Layne



Guest List

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001
Front Desk

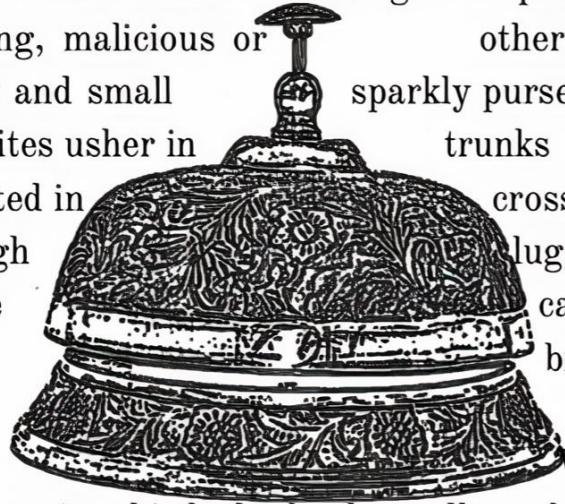
It's an instinct of mine to always look at people's hands. What someone is holding is often the key to their intentions. It makes me nervous when I can't see them. My hand holds a fountain pen and rests atop the hotel ledger. I stand as gatekeeper and try to decipher the mysteries as they're brought into the hotel. Staring at the thirty-fourth entry of the day

Rm. 999

Ms. van der Berg

10:36pm

I am overwhelmed by a character that reminds me of the dangers in people's hands. Most everyone carries something, malicious or otherwise. Partygoers carry bottles of champagne and small sparkly purses big enough for only a two-dollar bill. Socialites usher in trunks with gold threaded calligraphic initials repeated in crosswise patterns. Rich honeymooners tote enough luggage to fill two carts. But this man before me carries only a strained fist. His alcohol-soaked breath lurks eight feet up in the air and drains from a face littered with creases and stubble. What had once been a nice shirt now drapes against his body, haphazardly tucked in and stained with sweat. His feet don't pause as he passes my mahogany watchtower. I feel defenseless behind this desk. The sweat off my hand mixes with the ink of an earlier patron



Rm. 790

Mr. Brown

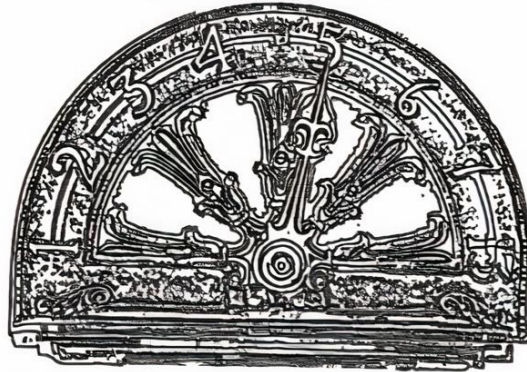
8:42pm

and smudges across the paper. I throw the elevator man a look of warning as the sheer force of the giant scares me into letting him pass.



The room had started spinning hours ago, but this was the least of Dorothy van der Berg's problems. The radio vibrates beneath its volume and underscores the cheers of those lost to poisonous acts. Sticky bodies press together in movement as spilled champagne pops on the timber countertop. A pinched lime wedge sits next to a tall glass with a lipstick-stained rim. A priceless painting fallen slant by those unable to notice. The disjointed harmony fills every nook of the hotel and provides the perfect hiding spot from the noises in your head. Overlooking the sea of top hats and cigarette holders, Dorothy van der Berg rests in her throne and basks in the roaring symphony. A returned invitation with an unbroken seal crumples in her fist. With her throat held hostage by the hand of restraint, she endures the blaze radiating from its grasp. Strained beneath its weight, Dorothy van der Berg pushes her way through the mob of sweat and skin that's flooded her hotel room. Positioning the coffee table beneath her feet, she yells for no one to hear.





I want to be nothing. A silent servant for the rich, I keep my head bowed and my ears peaked. Twenty trips to the top floor to bring the princess her party guests. Twelve trips to the second floor where the bar is hosting a lazy jazz singer. Two trips to the eighth floor to help the happy couple to their suite. My ankles ache as I creep into my third illegal hour, and my eyelids fight the magnets drawing them closer. My gut drops when the receptionist looks at me with wide eyes, and I see the monster approaching my elevator. The scent of whiskey stings my brain as any trace of Chanel perfume is demolished from the elevator. He gruffs out the number eight and I obey, closing the gate to our iron cage. The goliath stands in the inverse corner, locking any words behind a set of clamped teeth, eroding under the pressure of his gums. The heat off his forehead radiates the tiny room and causes my scalp to itch. He disembarks and the breath I didn't know I was holding releases from my lungs. I push and pull my levers until the earthly deities are satisfied and try to ignore the growing hours. Taking one last reveler to the top floor, I'm preparing to leave the mechanical prison when the shriek of a child's innocence lost suddenly rings through my ears.

790
Standard Suite

I stopped trusting my senses once the portrait blinked back at me. Pressing my body into the desk chair, I let the glass cool my palm. Amber liquid swirls within it and propels the ice in a small whirlpool. A deep *thunk* rattles within my head, within my suite. I'm not sure which. My own stupor underscored by the party of some spoiled brat. Heat penetrates the walls of this godforsaken room. Another *thunk* and this time I know it can't be in my head. The glass chandelier

vibrations of my noisy still-staring portrait breaking our gaze. A fury rushes over me and chair under my feet. My ceiling too many times and demands silence from to my assigned seat in the I let myself get lost in behind. With swift silence,



twinkles beneath the neighbors, and the trembles, momentarily new wave of heated

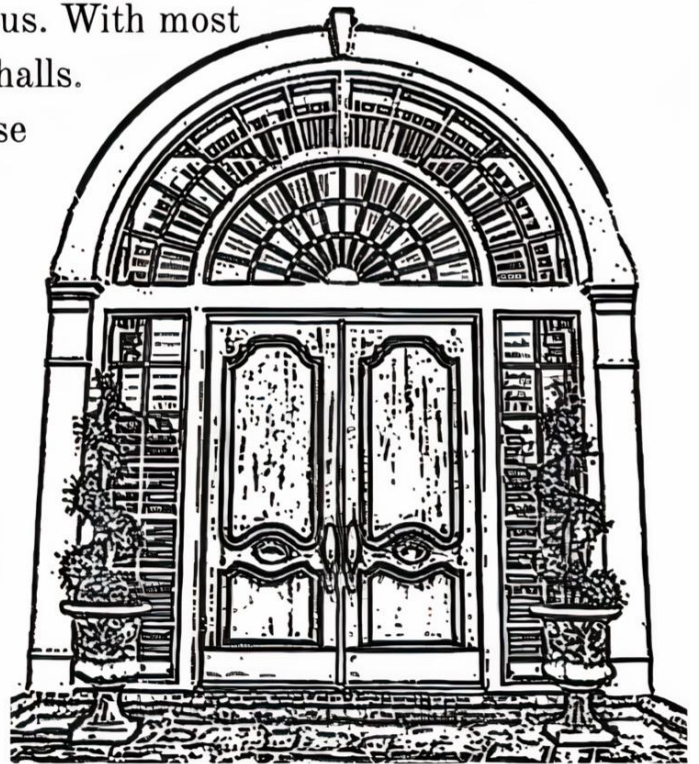
I throw the desk hardened fist raps the for this mind to count, its recipient. Returning room that entombs me, the wallowing I'd left the haze in my brain is cleared by the passing of a man in front of my window. Gone as quickly as he had appeared, the large figure came from a floor above and let his body succumb to gravity. I remain frozen, not entirely convinced I haven't lost my mind at last. But someone's piercing scream pulls my head through the window, where I see the bent shape of a man in a pool of growing blood.

870-899
Hallway

Getting lost was Betty Bailey's favorite thing to do. She'd wander her little feet past the "keep out" signs and through the lock-picked doors. Always going alone, except with the insatiable need to explore—which was odd because she was only six years old. After waiting for the steady snore of her mother in the next bed, Betty slips away to explore the secrets of the Hotel Amorous. With most souls asleep, she stalks the mahogany halls.

Sconces made of dangling crystals cause light to glisten on the concave ceiling.

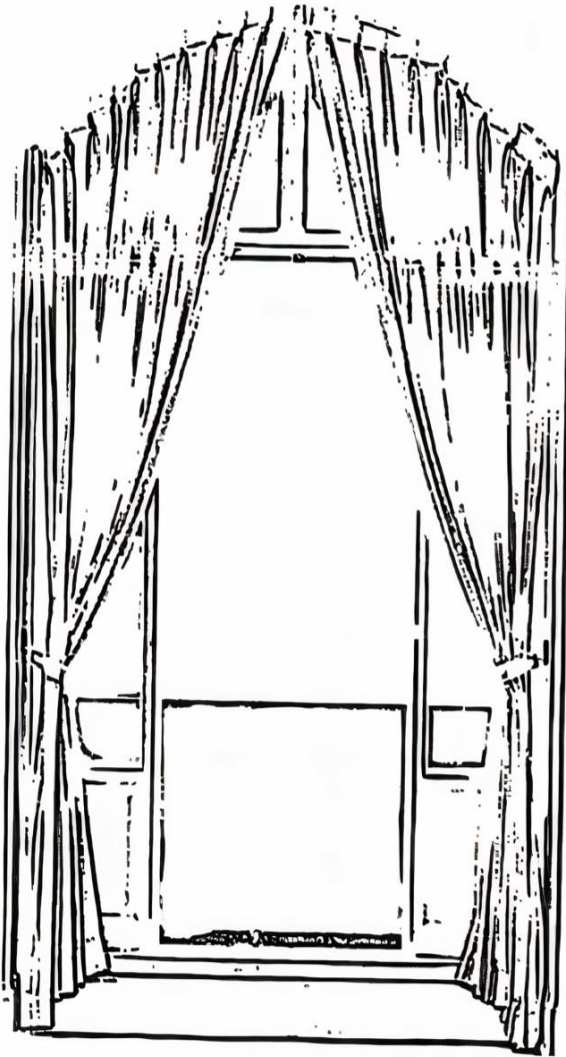
A portfolio of art backed by a singular wallpaper that compliments every piece. It's nothing Betty hasn't seen before. With one hall left to try, she finds herself fronted by a set of gilded doors left unshut. Compelled by the warm breeze from within, she calls out, but there's no one to hear. She pulls back the imposing door and reveals the bloody fount. Fallen over



an old trunk, a woman's back arches to an unnatural degree, creating a shrine for the wound in her gut. Locking eyes with a woman who can't see her, Betty Bailey couldn't restrain the screech erupting from her throat.

890

Honeymoon Suite



She stumbles backwards as I withdraw my knife from her gut. Trying to pull away from me, her elbow tugs within my locked fist. She squirms to look for her preferential husband, but I don't let her. I don't let her turn around and see the limp hand draped across the bathroom floor. The look in her eyes battles pity and loathing as she stares back at me. Lips like velvet rope, now dripping with a red stream. The rhythm beneath her chest fades and takes my lover with it. Now lying where she once stood, her hair blankets the luggage never to be unpacked. Her eyes remain open, and I can't make myself close them. A cadence of anger rumbles beneath the floorboards. It's only now that I remember the dripping blade in my grasp. The red liquid seeps between my fingers and my heart plunges down to my gut. The handle begins to burn in my palm, and I drop the dagger into the growing blood. The warm breeze from the window compels me, so I fly with her to the street down below.

August 12th
1:13-1:47am
Selcouth, California