

# Grub Hotel Stories

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<a href="#">Story One</a>	George Jones and Wild Bonnie
<a href="#">Story Two</a>	Lacey Storm Cole
<a href="#">Story Three</a>	Patrice Rachael Dustin
<a href="#">Story Four</a>	Jackie Jasmin Westly
<a href="#">Story Five</a>	Jacob and Donna Brazille

## STORY ONE:

George Jones' car began to worry him. First, the Check Engine light did not bother him since a hundred things could turn it on. However, fifty miles later, the transmission started malfunctioning, and it got progressively worse. Then George grew concerned because he drove an unfamiliar stretch of road in eastern Pennsylvania after dark, with no other traffic and no cities or houses around. The next city listed on road signs was Lancaster, thirty-five miles away, and there was not even a hint at a rest area or a housing area, nothing that would or could be of use to him.

"Damn my luck!" he swore, and the transmission added intermittently downshifting to the lowest gear to its repertoire of annoyance.

He pounded the steering wheel and cursed his reluctance to part with the vehicle and purchase a new one. It was still worthwhile to him, and a new car would only add a financial strain on his tight budget. The vehicle was new when Danny was born, and he bought it for all the up-to-date safety features. Now, both Danny and the car showed their age. Danny was a barrel of energy, exploration, and discovery. The vehicle had any problem a car could experience. However, he kept nursing it along, hoping each repair would last until his big opportunity happened.

"That's a flipping joke and a half! By the time my big break gets around, I'll be under six feet of dirt and unable to enjoy it! Thanks a lot, life! You're so great to me and mine! Dammit!"

He eased off the road and opened his cell phone, yielding to his distress and willing to call for roadside assistance. The screen illuminated, checked the signal strength, and went into shock at zero network bars.

"You've got to be shitting me?" He turned the phone off and on several times while pointing it in different directions and getting the same results.

"Double dammit! This is not cool! Fate! Karma! Whichever one is messing with me right now, please stop! This is not funny, and I'm not laughing!"

He tried again, laying it on the seat beside him with a heavy sigh.

He prayed, took some deep breaths, neared the point of crying, and relaxed enough to learn where he had stopped. Around thirty feet before him, illuminated by the

headlights, was a small sign off the road's edge announcing "Grub Motel, four miles ahead."

A few hundred feet apart, signs read:

"Reasonable rates."

"Air-conditioned rooms."

"Microwave Oven."

"TV w/150 channels."

"Free Pen and Paper for last notes, last wills, etc."

"Always a vacancy for people with little life problems. Come on down."

"Sun-of-a-gun! I don't remember that hotel, but it works for me tonight."

He pulled the gear shift from park to drive and requested, "Come on. Work with me, tranny, and we'll both get rest for tonight."

He let off the brake, and with plenty of grinding gears and whining, the car moved onto the empty road with what George called a final death throe. Fifteen minutes later, he parked in front of the Grub Hotel with a sign above the door with three lawn-destroying bugs in one corner.

"Just great. Wonder how many negative sign comments they receive? I guarantee they'll receive some from me. Those noxious stunted worms made me nauseous, and I couldn't eat dinner."

He stopped the engine and went inside. He waved a hand in front of his face at the smell of stale cigarette smoke that filled the room and still drifted up from behind the counter.

The man stood, and George gave a mental head shake. He wore a once white but now a dingy yellow tee-shirt and black cotton shorts with no pockets. He had yellow-stained teeth, visible when he talked.

"Howdy, stranger. I'm glad you chose us for your place to rest tonight. What can I do for you?"

"I need a room for the night."

"Can you pay in cash, in advance? My card reader is as temperamental, as my wife, and it won't work tonight. She hasn't worked in nearly twenty years. Should make a fresh start and get rid of both freeloaders at once. What do you think?"

"I think I need a room for cash. Good luck, I'll let you worry about your wife and reader."

The man laughed and scratched his belly. "Now, that sounds good to me. Still, I must ask, you know. Never know when some sucker won't be paying attention and suddenly own the hotel and both freeloaders. That will be \$65 for the night, buddy."

George shook his head, dug the money from his wallet, and laid it on the counter.

The man moved it from sight under the counter and handed George a key. "Hope you don't mind going way out west," he drawled. "That's where it is, the last room at this hotel, Room Eight. I labeled it Room Eight because there are no more rooms after that unless you want to take \$10 back and sleep on the ground under the willow tree."

George picked up the key. "I don't think so. Is there nothing to fill out? No forms?"

"Nah, the pen ran out of ink five years ago, and there has been no need to go to town for anything recently. I know who I am; you know who you are, and I have your money for tonight. Problem solved, except for you to enjoy your stay, sir."

George shrugged and turned hesitantly. "Okay. If you say so, but that's strange."

“I do say so because it’s my place and my rules. And if you truly want to see strange, I’ll send my wife to wake you in the morning. That will be strange enough to frighten you and keep you awake for the next three days.”

“Never mind. Do your phones work?”

“Yes, sir. Ever since I put them in. Just dial the number you want. I never invested in a switchboard. I’m too cheap to hire an operator.”

“How will you bill me for the calls I make?”

“I won’t bill you. Ohio Bell might if they can track you down, but I’m wealthy enough to pay the bills and then some. So, make the calls you need to help yourself out of your jam, and don’t worry. The more you question, the more I find you untrustworthy and want to reconsider renting the room. Need we go further? The next hotel is twenty-four miles farther west, and your car doesn’t sound like it’s got ten feet left before conking out.”

“Can I leave it where it is until I get a tow truck in the morning?”

“Suits me fine, so long as it’s potty trained and doesn’t pee on the pavement.”

“I hate it when that happens, and I finally sent her through obedience school a year ago. She’ll do fine now.”

“Grand, sir. Now, go and have the memorable night you deserve. Sleep well and dream magnificent dreams.

\*

The room was small and bland, but George considered it worth the \$65 cash and put his suitcase on the provided rack under a pole with some hangers available. He tossed his coat on the bed, washed his face and hands, and moved the coat to a chair as he sat on the bed and picked up the phone.

He gave a mental thumbs up to the dial tone and called home.

“Hey, Sibyl. Yes, it’s me. Sorry, I won’t make it home tonight. No, I’m in some fleabag hotel near Lancaster, Pennsylvania. Had to pay cash; imagine that. No, the car broke down. Yes, dear. I heard every time you said I needed to get a new one. Maybe this is the time I’ll act on it. I don’t know. I’ll have to call and find the heart to trade up for a newer model. Yes, dear. Sleep well and dream wonderful dreams, and I’ll call you in the morning, beautiful.”

He kissed the phone, disconnected, pondered his sanity for spending \$65 on a cheap hotel room, wondering if they had grubs instead of bedbugs, yawned, stretched out on the bed, and told the world goodnight.

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Near 1:30, George awakened to a loud crash and grinding metal. He rolled over to see the door ripped from the hinges and felt a rush of cold outside air blowing across the bed.

“What the hell?” he asked. As the door closed again, he propped himself on elbows, and a rough-looking character suddenly stood beside the bed. Afterward, George saw the gun barrel wavering in front of his face.

“Who are you?” asked the rough feminine voice.

“George Jones.”

“The singer?”

“No, the insurance salesman.”

“What are you doing here?”

“My car broke down, and I needed a room for the night.”

“And I’m supposed to care? Damn it all! Can’t these hayseed nitwits do anything right? You’re not supposed to be here. This is my room until I tell them I don’t need it anymore.”

“I can go somewhere else and let you have the room?”

“With a broken-down car? Dumb ass! Just shut up a moment until I decide what to do.”

He took the hint and nodded.

She lowered the gun to point at the floor. “Scoot over. I like this side of the bed.” She waited until the pillow was clear and made a big show of putting the gun underneath.

“So, here’s the deal. The bed’s big enough for both of us. We’ll sleep here tonight, and when we leave in the morning, you might be pregnant, but you’ll get over it.”

“Yeah, right. Men don’t get pregnant.”

“When you’re dealing with Wild Bonnie, I’d not make an ironclad statement like that. The last man learned the hidden truth that men can get pregnant. He damned near died during birth because the penis won’t stretch like the vagina does. It hurt a lot, but father and son both survived.”

“You’re strange.”

“No, the owner’s wife, Nellie, is strange. Have you seen her? No, you haven’t. You’re still here. People who see her can’t stay here long. They feel like 1000 cooties are crawling over them after the meeting.”

“Never mind. I’m married, and I shouldn’t be doing this.”

“Well, I’m not married, and I’m not so hot about being married, so there. And what do you think you’ll be doing that you shouldn’t?”

“Um, never mind, I think I’ll just go to sleep, and when I wake, this bad flipping nightmare might be over. So, good night.”

She removed her clothes until she reached her underwear and lay beside him. “Good night, grumpy one who wants to touch me but is afraid that his wife might find out when she’s not here and get all mad and cut him off for a year or maybe two.”

“I don’t want to touch you!”

“Yes, you do. If you care to, prove it by sleeping on your stomach. Hah! I love that look. Boners make it difficult to sleep that way. Looks like we’re building a new Denial River. What’s next?”

“Shut up and go to sleep!”

“Scared of your wife. Scared of touching me. Scared of getting pregnant. Pathetic excuse for a man. Get it wet. It’s okay. She’ll never know if you don’t hit your knees in confession when you first see her. And if by some remote chance, she questions you, tell her about Wild Bonnie and getting pregnant, and she’ll laugh so hard she’ll never believe the truth.”

“You’re nuts, woman. Just go to sleep.”

“If you wanted me to sleep, you needed to stop me before I undressed this far. The more clothes I take off, the more I get turned on by men wanting to get pregnant.”

“Gah! I don’t believe this is happening! It only happens in movies!”

“It also happens in Room Eight of the Grub Hotel in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.”

“No, it doesn’t!”

She caught a hand and put it below her breasts.

“I’m here. I’m real. I want it. I’m ready. I hope I don’t have to wait until morning for you to relax, forget the wife, and catch up with me.”

“I’m going to wake the owner, get \$10 back, and sleep under the willow tree!”

“Oh, grimalkins! Why me? Why now?” She rolled to her side, grabbed his face, and kissed him passionately.

“Better now?”

“I didn’t know women could kiss like that so suddenly.”

“Want more? Got lips?”

“Okay. You win. I sure hope Sibyl gets over this.”

“Tell her the truth, and she’ll never believe you.”

“Shut up and kiss me while I go for the breasts.”

“Best offer anyone gave me for a long time.”

\*

George woke at five o’clock with her soft, warm, nude body partially lying on him and not knowing if he was alive or dead or still having sex with her. He felt joy, peace, and contentment that astonished him.

“Wild is a mild term that you think of as a fleeting memory when you’re 100 and trying to recall a night like this,” he thought.

She woke and smiled as she gazed into his eyes.

“See? I told you what would happen if you got all my clothes off. Are you a believer now?”

“Yes. I’m another Bonnie fan now.”

“And what will you tell poor little Sibyl?”

“The truth about Wild Bonnie. That should keep her laughing a week since she thinks some of what we did is impossible.”

She kissed him, and the door crashed open. The small room suddenly had six men in sheriff uniforms and guns drawn.

She grabbed her gun from the pillow and faced them defiantly. “Get out of here! You butt holes need to learn how to knock first!”

“Cut the crap, Bonnie!” said the sheriff. “What did you do with it? Where is it?”

“Bite me!”

“Look. You’ll not get away with it this time. You’re done. Give it up, and the end will go easier for you.”

“Bite me twice!”

“After what you’ve done? I don’t think so. Where is it?”

“I gave it to charity. Those poor, hungry little tykes broke my heart, and I gave it all away.”

“Bitch!”

Bonnie cursed and shot him.

The rest opened fire, and after fourteen hits, her dead and bleeding body lay sprawled across the bed.

The deputies looked at George, and one grinned. “I’ll bet he’s going to puke.”

Another said, "No way. If he's strong enough to live through Wild Bonnie, he can handle the blood."

George made a dash for the bathroom but did not quite make it.

"Told you so," said the deputy.

George made it up with the Sheriff's help and sat in a chair as they put her body in a big bag and carried her out of the hotel.

"Did you see what she did with the money?" the Sheriff asked.

"I never saw anything but her. After she put the gun away, I didn't want to see, feel, kiss, or taste anything but her. Women like that don't need to die, ass wipe."

The outburst did not affect the Sheriff. "Be that as it may, she stole \$175,000 from a bank in Pittsburgh and had to do something with it."

George shook his head. "She gave it to charity. I heard her tell you that."

"Well, we need to buy her story on that, now won't we, George. So, what are your plans for the day?"

"I need to arrange for my car to be towed and the transmission fixed. Then I'm out of here."

"Can you give me a business card so I can contact you if I have any questions?"

He handed the Sheriff a card and shook his head at the bloody bed. "Damn, what a shame. I was ready to divorce my wife for her. Man, what a wild woman. What a damned shame that Karma tracked me down here and ruined it for me. You suck, but I'll leave you alone."

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Without Bonnie, he prepared for his day and went to the office to check out after arranging a tow truck.

"Sorry about the noise, sir. I never planned on that happening."

"Say what? What noise?"

"You didn't hear the crashing door or the gunshots?"

"Oh, crap! Not again. Damn that woman! I wish she'd get gone to where she belongs, either place, and leave me alone."

"What are you talking about? You mean Wild Bonnie, don't you?"

"Yes! Lame ass woman! Robbed a bank in Pittsburgh twenty-six years back and made it to this hotel and Room Eight. Her boyfriend caught up with her here, and so did the Sheriff and his deputies. Riddled her body in the bed while she was naked. Had to shut down for a day and a half because of the violent death. What a freaking mess to clean up. And if that wasn't enough, she comes back on occasion, and the male guests swear she rapes them, and when they leave in the morning, there's a huge suitcase full of money stuffed under the trunk of their car. And she does leave when the deputies kill her and leave the mess for me to clean up. Wish that part was ghostly."

"Are you kidding me? That woman was a ghost?"

"As ghostly as they come, buddy. However, from all the past men, I'll bet she left you drip-dried."

"She sure did. I was torn between going on or hanging with her for the rest of my life. Wait! A suitcase of money? No. No way!"

The owner followed him, and under the trunk of his car was a black physician-style satchel.

George dragged it out and opened it on the trunk of his car. Inside were bundles of bills in twenties, fifties, and hundreds. On top was a note from Wild Bonnie.

“Sorry, honey. Hope I didn’t frighten you too much while I waited for Clyde. He didn’t show, but you damned sure did. Tell Sibyl to take a long walk on a short pier and find yourself a real woman like me. And if she doesn’t want to walk alone, shove her.

“This money should take care of all your problems. It’s old money now, and banks no longer care for it. Keep it. Use it to get out of debt. And most of all, keep your mouth shut. And if you absolutely must tell someone, tell them the truth, and watch them walk away muttering something like, ‘Stupid bastard,’ or ‘Crazy fool,’ or ‘Should have known better than to ask the village idiot.’”

“Love ya bunches, Wild Bonnie.”

## STORY TWO:

Lacey Storm Cole drove alone from Denver, Colorado, to the Big Apple, New York City, and a promising career on Broadway. The competition neared an end, and after 27 shows, she was still #2 on the list and felt as high as Ben Franklin’s kite in a thunderstorm. She grew tired, shut off the radio, and slipped in a CD of Sousa Marches to get her blood flowing and her mind off her lazy snooze buttons.

“BRAPPP!”

The driver’s alert noise scared her when she drifted from the road, and she jerked in her seat and shook her head sharply as she forced her eyelids wide open.

“Drifted off the road again, huh? Okay, Lacey. That’s it. Find a hotel, a campground, a rest area, anything, and stop for the rest of the night.”

She lowered the A/C, slowed her speed, and scanned the roadside for signs of civilization and hotels. Her heart leaped for joy two minutes later when she saw the sign, “Grub Hotel. Reasonable rates. Always a Vacancy for the Weary and Downtrodden. Come on Down!”

“Bless you, Karma, Fate, or whatever. I love you, and I’ll let you be my favorite fan if you will. Weird name, but just what I need right now.”

She shook her head again, yawned, took the hotel exit, and stopped in the empty parking lot.

“This is it?” She viewed the sign above the door labeled “OFFICE” and stretched. “Don’t knock it until you’ve checked out tomorrow, today, or whenever.”

She tried the office door, and it creaked on moving, and a small bell dinged once somewhere in the rear of the building.

She glanced around the untidy, small office and considered sleeping in her car when the rear door opened, and the owner stepped inside. He appeared unkempt, wearing a stained, faded white tee shirt and black cotton shorts.

His pleasant voice did not match his appearance. “Howdy, Miss. How are you this beautiful starlit night?”

“Thoroughly exhausted. I need a room, bad. I hope there is a vacant one. Please?”

He shrugged slightly. “You need a room, bad? All we have left is one bad room. Do you want it?”

She frowned and concentrated on his emotionless face. “Did I hear you right? Did you say you had a bad room left?”

“That’s right. I whipped it, sent it to bed hungry, put it in time out for a week, threatened to burn it, and it’s still bad. However, it’s got a comfortable bed, and people enjoy it. It’s not all a room could be if it would behave and grow up. You know?”

Lacey frowned again. “I don’t know. I’m not familiar with room personalities, and I’m too tired to be picky tonight. I’ll take it. How much?”

“Your name and phone number on this index card and what it takes to get you so sexually excited you can’t say no.” He slid a card and a pen across the counter before her.

Her frown deepened. “Beg pardon? Did I hear you right? You didn’t proposition me, did you?”

“No, I’ll do that later when I know what you like and when you’re not tired.”

“What? Don’t you like tired women?”

“Not particularly. I did that once about 20 years ago, and I can’t get rid of her, no matter how I try. So, I don’t need to repeat the error.”

She picked up the pen, hesitated, and laid it down. “No, I’m not buying that.”

He snapped his fingers and laughed. “Darn. Almost had you on that one. How about \$65 cash, and we call it even?”

“You’re strange, and this is a weird hotel, but I’ll buy that.” She opened her wallet, counted the cash, and laid it before him on the card with the pen on top.

“What do I need to fill out?”

“You refused that, so here’s your key. It’s Room Eight on the west end of the building. Enjoy your stay with us, Miss Cole.”

“I certainly hope so. I need to be in Manhattan in two days, and then I’ll be able to enjoy life for a while.”

“What’s going on there?”

“I landed a major part in a Broadway play that’s starting up and running for three years. It’s called Standing Ovation, written by Robert McIntyre. That’s a wonderful thing for me. Ever since I was three and could barely walk, I’ve dreamed of being on Broadway.”

“Hey, congratulations, Miss Cole. That’s wonderful news that I can use for years to come. I’ll put a sign on the door, ‘Miss Cole slept here,’ and charge \$85 a night versus \$65. Thanks so much for stopping by. Could you sign your name only on the card for me with nothing else?”

She blushed and picked up the pen. “I guess I can do that. You’re a very enterprising gentleman. I’ll see you at checkout time in the morning.”

He picked up the card with her name and looked at the closed door with a mischievous grin.

“You never asked about the checkout time, Miss Cole. What if we don’t honor that nuisance? I guess we’ll see how you feel in the morning.”

\*

Lacey disrobed and showered. She left the bathroom with a towel wrapped around her waist and worked a smaller one through her hair. She froze like a statue at the foot of the bed and felt goosebumps on her goosebumps. The clothing she removed was



stuffed with something and placed together to appear sitting in the only easy chair in the room by the window. The headless condition upset her.

“What the hell?” Her eyes went straight to the door, where she added her slide lock and alarm. It was still in place and gave no indication of entry.

“What the hell?” she repeated and gingerly approached the clothing and poked the blouse with a finger. It was soft and spongy and offered enough resistance to resemble human flesh. She picked up the blouse, removed the stuffing, and counted 65 tied shopping bags in just the blouse.

“Now, isn’t that a coincidence if there ever was one. \$65 for the room and 65 bags in my blouse.”

She picked up her jeans and found 65 in each leg and in the top to fill them out. She deposited the bags in the trash and picked up the phone to complain, and there was not even a dial tone.

“Oh well.” She picked up a business card from the nightstand and opened her cell phone. “That’s why they make these, and I bought one.”

She stared in icy silence at no bars, tried three phone calls that ended in nothing but frustration and studied the door. “So, we take the complaint to the owner in person.”

She donned her clothing, removed her private security lock, twisted the deadbolt, and unlocked the knob. She turned the knob with a sigh of relief, and nothing happened. The door would not budge even a hair’s width.

She sat on the bed again, looked at the overflowing garbage can, and did breathing exercises to calm down.

“Okay, Lacey Storm Cole. There is a reason for this; how you react to it will be good or bad. We choose good. Let’s face this as if it was a part of a play. You are in this hotel room with no way to communicate with the outside world. However, in some fashion or method, someone is watching to see how you react, and eventually, maids will show up to clean the room and then make your break. Or the owner will be knocking on the door looking for more cash. What you do between now and then will depend on whether you are found sane and relaxed or a super challenged mental case.”

She tested the windows and found them locked and not workable. The bathroom had no window, only a small vent in the wall for the exhaust fan that was far too tiny for her body, even if she could remove it.

“So, I’m well trapped and at the mercy and whim of whoever set me up, like the owner. Would he have done this if I gave him the information he wanted? No. That’s not a good way to think. I don’t need to compromise my morals when I am unaware of any situation like this arising. So, what do I do?”

“I’ll go to bed, use my self-hypnosis relaxation techniques, and wait to see what happens next. I look forward to restful sleep to stay alert and act when the chance arrives.”

The self-hypnosis techniques worked well, and she drifted to sleep with little effort. She felt warm, warmer, and cozier than she could ever recall. The bed where she lay grew comfortable and luxurious. She could not remember when her shoes and socks were removed, but she did recall when the fingertips began to tickle the soles of her feet. She jerked and kicked and twisted, trying and failing to free her lower legs from the solid yet soft hands that held them.

She resisted laughing until she could no longer control herself and indulged in a good belly laugh to the point of crying and pounding the mattress insanely. Then, just as suddenly as it started, it stopped, and the hands and fingers disappeared with a soft ting sound. Again, she laughed and giggled until she regained self-control and breathed normally again.

Then, as if a switch was flipped inside her mind, she relaxed and slept soundly.

\*

When she woke again, her clothes were gone, and though she could feel nothing on her wrists or ankles, she was spread eagle, and fingers teased and toyed with her armpits until she wriggled and tried a fruitless escape. She continued to avoid it but soon gave into more giggles and yelps of hilarity.

The invisible fingers moved as a coordinated unit, circled her breasts upward to her neck, and squeezed her earlobes before leaving her.

She lay breathless, wondering where they would find a place on her body to tickle her again when she felt a hot, moist tongue slide under the toes on her left foot. It dipped across her soles to her heel, back to her toes, and wet suction tugged her big toe upward.

She gasped, and the fingers were on top of both ankles. They rotated half circles on each leg as they slowly inched upward, instigating twitches of chilling electricity, which were annoying but soon changed to pleasure and more giggles.

“What are you doing? Are you trying to kill me with laughter?”

“That might not be a bad idea. Then I could do this to you for eternity.”

“Then that’s a marvelous idea. This is very erotic.”

His fingers had passed her legs and centered on her navel, circling it and pressing it inside. Then, without warning, his hands moved to her sides, gripped her skin, and tugged until her navel felt it would split from the pressure. She caught her breath, grabbed the sheets in her hands, and braced herself against the sting.

Just as suddenly, the pressure left her sides, and she felt her navel sucked into the same hot mouth that her toe felt, and then it was gone. But, in its wake, it left a tingling she never imagined, and a hand smacked it, and instead of painful yips, it started her chuckling and then moaning.

She panicked when she could not feel the fingers or touch of the ghostly lover and strained her hearing.

“Hey, are you there? Where did you go? Yo! Please don’t leave me like this.”

“This shouldn’t make you laugh. Instead, it should add the final addition to the masterpiece of love and sexuality you are, dear woman.”

“Cool. How did you know to do all that when I didn’t know myself?”

“I’m paid to know, sweet thing.”

Lacey had a response prepared; however, she had no time to voice it before the hot mouth rested on her right breast and fingers on the left. Simultaneously, teeth bit into her right nipple, and the left felt crushed by the thumb and forefinger. Then, just when she thought she would scream from the pain, they ceased together, and she relaxed with a contented sigh.

“How can you do that when I can’t see you?”

“The same way I can do this.”

A hand rested on, squeezed, and pulled her pubic hair.

“You’re beautiful yet lonely, Lacey Storm Cole. Have I ignited your sexuality sufficiently to prevent you from saying no to finishing this love session?”

“Yes. Until now, I occasionally dreamed of it happening this way. The reality is a thousand times more exciting. What are you waiting for?”

Her hands and ankles were freed to allow participation in what happened next.

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It was 5:45 a.m. when she woke the last time, and her eyes focused on the alarm clock by the bed. She groaned and licked her lips a few times to get some moisture flowing into her dry mouth.

“Dang, you outdid yourself last night, girlfriend.”

She smiled at the memories and added them for her benefit. “Who wouldn’t with such a perfect lover in your bed?”

Her body wrenched in a panic, and she pushed herself up to sit on the bed.

“NO! Please, no! Come on, Karma. Please don’t do that to me! Ghost! Please say or do something. Don’t be gone. Come on! Don’t leave me here like this!”

She felt around the bed, strained her hearing, but could feel or hear nothing except her in the room. After a few moments, she gave up the search in vain, grabbed her pillow, and cried herself to sleep on the floor at the foot of the bed, where most of the sheets and blanket lay and where he loved her body the second time.

\*

Sunshine rudely hit her eyelids, and a rush of cold air sent impolite shivers down her body, unlike the pleasant ones at night. She opened her eyes, squinted, and saw two pairs of ankles inside the door.

A feminine voice spoke. “What happened, dear? You’re naked. Were you raped?”

“No way. I gave it up as freely as possible and enjoyed every moment. I’m crying now because he left me alone when I wanted more of him.”

“From the looks of the room, I imagine you enjoyed it. Do you need some time to wake up and leave? We need to get this room cleaned, and we can’t with you sleeping on the floor like this.”

She sat up and let the sheets fall away. Before she stood erect, she heard several gasps and other exclamations.

“What?”

“Your face and body!” The older woman pointed crudely. “Go on to the bathroom and check it out. We’ll be back in fifteen minutes. Is that time enough to clear out?”

“Yes, rude one.”

With the lights turned on in the bathroom, she looked at her face, neck, and chest as far as she could see. Wherever his ghostly fingers touched her, they left solid brownish-red lines that resembled henna tattoos. They circled her breasts, making them look like spirals on a pinwheel. She blinked and stepped back to view her legs and saw the same lines there and down to her feet.

“That’s awesome! Wonder how he did that? No wonder it tickled so much. That was a perfect sexual experience.”

She viewed her sad face in the mirror. “Now he’s gone. Darn, my luck. Oh, well, let’s see if this washes off?”

She washed her face and looked at it in the mirror again. The lines were still there.

“Talk about a loving autograph that won’t disappear. I’m happy it doesn’t look horrid, so I can live with it. Wonder how many conversations will begin with ‘What happened to your face? Where did you get that done?’ Wonder how many will walk away thinking I’m possessed when I tell them the truth. Oh, shit! What about my part in the play on Broadway?”

She sighed and rested her hands on the sink. “Only time will tell, and I CAN’T turn it down. They might reject me or figure a way to cover it up, and life will proceed.”

She snapped her fingers. “And I don’t know his name. Dammit, Lacey!”

She dressed and checked out and refused to answer any questions from the owner. Instead, she told him it would be long before she graced his hotel again and loaded her car.

She sat in the driver’s seat and sighed forlornly. “Man, I’m going to miss that ghost.”

She felt a hand rest on her right knee. “I didn’t know that. Are you certain?”

It made her so happy she glowed. “What? You didn’t leave me?”

“Why should I? I’ve waited eight years for you to get to Room Eight in the Grub Hotel. I have eternal patience, my sweet Lacey Storm Cole.”

“Awesome, my man. Would my dying help us?”

“Don’t think that or anticipate that. I’ll be at your side for many years before that happens. Right now, I’ll ride shotgun for you and handle all the light work that comes my way. Well, all the heavy work also. I won’t let anyone mess with my laughing woman, you know? So why are you not driving? There’s a career waiting for you in Manhattan.”

### STORY THREE:

Patrice Rachael Dustin pulled into the parking lot with a short squeal of tires and shook her head at the small, drab hotel advertised on the highway as a Taj Mahal runner-up.

“Remember what your mother and father said, Patrice. You get what you pay for. So if you spend \$1.98, you should not expect any greater return than that.”

She looked at the sign again through the windshield displaying “Grub Hotel. The best one, the only one in the next 30 miles.” She grimaced at the picture of 3 grubs in one corner.

“However, this will be greater than \$1.98, and it’s perfect for the secrecy and privacy I need. No one knows this hotel is here or where I am, which spells pure paradise. So let the heartburn in others flare up and pass around the antacid tablets. Ta DA!”

She stood beside the car, stretched stiff muscles for a moment, and opened the office door. A bell chimed somewhere in the back of the building, and she eyed the man behind the counter.

She had second thoughts when he stood and saw his dingy and stained white tee and black shorts.

“Good afternoon, Missy. How can I help you today?”

“Well, I need a room, but not just one night. So, I figure a week would be fine for me.”

“Your wish is my command.”

Patrice shuddered. “That’s an overused expression. Try something fresher and something that offers you little to no hope of any time with me. How much for a week if I pay cash?”

He grinned, grunted, and sniffed loudly. “Well, normally I’d charge you \$455, but since you look distressed and even though you could afford it, and since I’m a sucker for crying women, I’ll let it go for \$250. Can you swing that?”

“I can do that. Do I look that bad?”

“Like the torrential downpour will start any minute. Please sequester yourself in Room Eight at the west end of the building, and don’t hesitate to call if you need anything reasonable.”

He turned to a board behind the counter with many keys and handed her the key to Room Eight.

“No paperwork?”

“Are you going to leave while there’s money left in your hourglass?”

“No.”

“How about when the room gets hungry and wants to eat you? Will you bolt then without a refund?”

“Huh?” She stepped back from the counter. “What? Are you drunk? Rooms don’t eat persons, I mean people. Or does this one?”

“Not for a few years. The last ones were a couple from Detroit with two of his girlfriend’s sisters, planning to go to Nebraska, join the Mormons, get married, and procreate abundantly. They didn’t quite make it. I forgot the room doesn’t like Mormon wannabes, and it left a few bones to give to their parents.”

“You’re strange, sir. You say that without flinching or cracking a smile. You must have had a lot of practice.”

She removed her wallet and counted \$250 for the week’s rent. “Anyway, I guess we both trust each other on this deal, huh?”

“We sure do. Welcome to Grub Hotel. Please enjoy your stay with us, Miss Dustin.”

“No paperwork to fill out? What about a receipt for the cash?”

He shook his head with a wink. “Is that necessary? If you leave early, there’s no refund. If you’re still here on day seven, I’ll be outside your door with a hand out for some more cash. If you try to leave with high-value items from the room, a sniper will take you out by the used car lot on the highway. You’ll get a free ride to the morgue, and the car will be confiscated and displayed on the car lot. When it sells, I’ll get 45%, and the contents of your purse, like credit cards, lipstick, tissues, and cash, will go to me, George Kelsey. All that helps honest people remain honest, don’t you think?”

“Whew! Works for me. Got all the angles covered and tidy like a mafia straitjacket.”

“Yep, that’s me.”

She turned to the door, hesitated, and faced him again. “Wait a darned minute. Do strange and unexplainable things happen in Room Eight?”

“Yes, ma’am, however, don’t ask what. Everyone is a different case. Nevertheless, if you have a problem when you walk into the room, you won’t take it when you check out. Please don’t ask because I can’t tell you how it works. I stopped trying to figure it out

and found a good cleaning company for when it gets bloody in a murder/suicide situation.”

He strained to keep his face deadpan, but her expression was too much to hold inside. So, finally, he let go of a huge belly laugh and waved her toward the door.

“Run along, Miss Patrice. That’s not happened there, but the problem-solving has, and they’ve all been non-violent.”

“Keep this job for a while, sir. You’ll never make it on Comedy Central.”

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She stepped inside the small room and closed the door behind her. “Not bad for the money. It’s even big enough for pacing if it gets to that point.”

She dropped her purse on the small table in front of the window and patted it.

“Relax. I know you’re there. I’ll get to you soon enough. You’ll get to share your orgasm with me and put me in a little hole in the ground, and I’ll never know about it.”

She opened the door to the bathroom and nodded approval.

“Not a luxury like we have at home, but adequate. Wow! Aren’t I special? It even has a complimentary hair dryer with a night light function. Sweet.”

She unwrapped a tiny soap, washed her hands, and sniffed her fingers.

“Hmm. Smells good.”

She viewed the countertop and the tub shelf and shook her head. “No bubble bath crystals or any foam. Oh well, I brought my own to make myself smell good all over, and we damn sure will. Too bad that doesn’t work for eliminating the smell of ill-loving men. Take a bubble bath and get their stink out of your life, wealth-loving bastards. Stop that, Patrice. Let it go. Like all other men and sad things and situations, we will overcome it all, flush it from our minds, and end up smelling like peaches and cream for a little while anyway. After the final orgasm, it won’t matter much to me if I stink.”

She shut the lights off and stopped at the cubbyhole that served as a wardrobe. She hung up her blazer and her skirt and kept her blouse. She unbuttoned it to let it hang open and folded the cuffs up. She kept on her red lace panties and kicked off her shoes. She paused to see her figure in the dressing mirror.

“We look good. So, what is the problem with men? Do we look too good?”

She modeled for herself to scrutinize her image.

“I was born Patrice Rachael Dustin. I’m from a strong Catholic background. I’m more Protestant than Catholic now, but I believe in God, Jesus, and the Church. I do give in to premarital sexual sin on occasion. However, I love unconditionally and wholeheartedly.”

She twisted to view a different angle.

“I’m hardworking and far from lazy. I have a promising career. I have a good stock portfolio and an excellent retirement account established. So, what the hell is wrong with me? Why can’t I have a good man to meet me head-on and love me as I love him? I’m sure you know, Lord. Can you show me and then show me how to change that part of me? Time doesn’t stop or even slow down for people. Will I keep losing until I end my life in some nursing home, alone, where my death will launch a massive investigation against them because of abuse?

“What am I doing wrong? I’d sure love to change. I’m alright most of the time, but I get lonely too often to suit my nerves.”

She blew her image a kiss and moved to a chair by the window, where she tugged the curtains open by hand far enough to let some sunlight inside but remain from public view. She picked up her water bottle and drank, reminding herself to get some ice later.

“So, here we are, Patrice. Wonder what Robert is doing? Does he have his ‘man’ posse in his ‘man’ cave, drinking beer and pondering the mean, spiteful bitch that disappeared from the face of the earth and trying to discover why? Or is he by himself and doing it all on his own? It would be interesting to know; however, I’m not interested enough to call him and find out.”

She drew her feet up to her butt and let her legs flop open. She raised her bottle in a salute.

“Here’s to you, good buddy, good lover, good man, good riddance. Best beware of taking a leap of faith around me because all the safety nets to catch you have been packed away for the next real man who will enter my life when you’re nothing but a memory.”

“I’ll drink to that. Good for you.”

“What?” She paused the bottle before her lips, glanced to the ceiling, and then the radio and television. She frowned and repeated the eye travel.

“There are no speakers in the ceiling or anywhere else. Relax. You’re safe.”

“What the hell?” She put her feet on the floor as she felt panic starting to build.

“Drat! That is so bothersome. You spoiled the beautiful view. You were not and are not in any danger, my lady. You are quite safe here in Room Eight.”

“Beautiful view?” She looked down at her lap.

“Yes, that one. Pearly feet tucked against your hips, the knees fully separated, exposing the narrow red cloth covering the genitalia. Very superb view, My Lady.”

“What the hell?”

“You need not repeat that phrase. I am not from hell or the Netherworld. I am from the earth.”

“Where are you? What are you? What are you doing here?”

“My name is Sir William Fontaine, and I sit in the chair opposite you, enjoying the view of your elegant and beautiful body. My Lady, you may resume that position or pose without alarm or fear or embarrassment.”

“Are you serious?”

“Yes, My Lady. As for what I am, I would be called a phantom or a wraith in your time.”

“And you’re Sir William Fontaine?”

“Yes, My Lady.”

“Why do you call me My Lady?”

“Because it is proper to address you that way since I do not know your name. And even if I do, it is still respectful to do so. Moreover, it’s the preferred nomenclature for women of aristocratic, finesse, and all cases of royalty.”

“This is weird, but my name is Patrice Rachael Dustin. You don’t need to use the full name for respect. Call me Patrice.”

“Patrice. Ah, that is a lovely name. Patrice. It’s been around since medieval times in England; in your gender case, it means noblewoman. It sounds delightful, rolling around the mouth and across the lips and twice as pleasing to the ears. Patrice, I love it.”

“This is weird, talking to a wraith.”

“No weirder than me talking to a Homo sapiens female.”

“I’ll buy that for now. Why are you here?”

“Other than enjoying the former view, did you not previously model before the mirror and ponder what was wrong with you?”

“Yes, I did that. But, unfortunately, I’m locked in a perpetual problem, and there seems to be no way out. Are you sure you cannot bother me?”

“I am extremely limited in what I can do when in the presence of humans. I cannot engage in sexual practices if that’s what you mean.”

“Well, okay then. Please enjoy.” She moved her feet back to her hips and let her legs open.

“Exquisite! It is the perfect touch to your overall projection of a desirable woman. Thank you, Patrice.”

“You’re welcome. Hmm. This is going to take a bit to feel right for me. How did you die?”

“Painfully and for nothing of importance. The Sheriff of Nottingham and his men hunted the myth they called Robin Hood. I happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, and when I was captured and questioned, my answers were insufficient for the Sheriff. So he ran me through with his sword and pierced my right kidney and intestines. Then he withdrew it and ran it through my heart because I could not answer what I did not know. And that action taught me a life lesson. When the Sheriff asks a question, you must know the answer.”

“Ouch! I’m so sorry, William. That’s a horrible way to die.”

“I appreciate your sympathy, but I got over it. Unfortunately, I haven’t found a way to release myself from this eternal sentence of wandering the earth in dismal loneliness.”

“I wish I could help you, sir, but I sit here with my problems.”

“And the problem is with your betrothed, your promised partner in marriage?”

“Robert was that. I stopped the marriage by disappearing and being incommunicado for a spell.”

“Why? Can you explain it to me?”

“Yes, I think I can. Robert’s a nice, kind, and loving man. At least, I felt so until about a week ago when he visited me with a crucial matter. That’s when he turned into a horrid man, at least for me.

“At this present time, we have what is called pre-nuptial agreements. They are drawn up and signed before the marriage takes place. The agreements usually spell out what will happen to monetary assets, property, houses, and such after the marriage. What is acquired after that time is up for a 50/50 split if a divorce happens. The pre-nuptials protect the party who owns any assets before the marriage and prevent the other party from touching or acquiring any part or portion of them.”

“Ah, what you’re saying is, if you own 1000 acres of land, the pre-nuptial in your benefit will prevent Robert from obtaining any of that land if he declares a divorce from you?”

“Yes.”

“And if the two of you obtained an additional 2000 acres and maybe gold and silver, then it would be split betwixt the two of you?”

“Perfect understanding.”

“Is that wrong?”



“For me, it is. That agreement to protect all that he has right now is more important to his life than I am. It tells me that he sees an early end to the marriage instead of anticipating us remaining married until one of us dies. But he knows it’s going to end, so he must initiate action to protect himself from my supposed greed when it happens.”

“Ah, and he sees nothing wrong with that?”

“No. He says it’s nothing and no big deal, but I must sign it before we get married.”

“That is a foolish statement. Something trivial is not worth voicing or putting on paper with a quill and ink. Does he own that much property?”

“He did. He inherited two castles and several thousand acres of land in Scotland and Wales. He sold them and invested in banks, a marina in Italy, and a few business properties in America. He’s worth a lot of money, but I’m not concerned with it.”

“I know that one. I heard you worry about dying lonely in a nursing home, whatever that is. How about you? Do you have or own assets?”

“Yes. I own four business rental properties I inherited from my mother when she died, and I hold quite a sum of cash and stocks in the bank for when I retire. My career is as a financial advisor, and I make a fair salary and bonuses. I don’t need his money, but he’s pushed his worry so much that he’s made me question his love. I love unconditionally. He cannot imagine that.

“And when it comes to the wedding vows, he’s insisted that we change them. After the minister says, do you take this person to love, everything else is removed. There is no honor to cherish, in sickness and health, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, until death does you part. We promise to love each other, and that’s it. All the commitment wording needs to be removed as rubbish and needless.”

She sighed and wiped a tear from her eye.

“And that has you here in this hotel, Room Eight, feeling down and unloved and not wishing to communicate with anyone?”

“Yes. For four years, I dated him and even had sex with him, and then last week, he hit me with all this, and he based it on his male friends getting married without pre-nuptials and losing everything to the ex-wives in a divorce.”

“Preposterous!”

“A tiny question, Sir William, if you were Robert, what would you do?”

“Easy answer, My Lady. I’d get to know you, learn about your career and investments your retirement accounts, and ask for your hand in marriage. Then I’d give you whatever fortune I had, tell you to grow it, and amass a combined fortune. At the same time, we raise a family and educate them as you appear, retire early and do whatever we please, when we please, and give the world raspberries for being envious of us.”

She sighed and closed her eyes, and her blouse opened more when she shifted positions. “That’s the perfect solution. Too bad you died when you did and could be born at this time. We would make a great team, you and me.”

“No doubt about it, and you’d not be here in secrecy with a bottle of pills in your purse. So when you use the bathroom next, please flush them. Don’t do that to yourself. It will affect Robert little, and it’s bad for you.”

“You’re too smart.”

“Would you like me if I were less than honest, like Robert?”

“No, you wouldn’t be here, or I’d have been long gone. Don’t change from what you are, Sir William.”

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