



# The Dead Floor

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May 08



In the room. It had been neatly tidied up. The bed sheets were straightened and the curtains were drawn back. The table next to the bed was covered with parchment: letters, newspapers, the Hotel TV guide and a few magazines.

Sitting on them was a bottle of beer. It had been knocked over on its side with its contents spilt onto the papers.

In the bathroom, the bath was still running. As a matter of fact, it was overflowing. Toothbrushes were floating on the surface and towels sank to the bottom. Most of the things from the racks were missing, and were emptied into the bath. It was like a blanket of toiletry, hiding almost everything beneath it from sight.

But it hadn't. Underneath the soap bars and shampoo bottles lay something one wouldn't normally get for room service. It was a body. A woman's. No cuts, no wounds, but lay still. She wasn't breathing. Her face was pale.

She was dead.

Five years later, a man from a distant country lay awake in bed, kept from rest by mystery and wonder. His head was filled with questions and pressure. Pressure from the big meeting he was going to attend the day after, and questions from the hotel he was going to stay in. He kept on thinking, forcing himself away from sleep. About the rumour. About the mysterious death. And the timing was so strange. All of which had happened – five years ago.

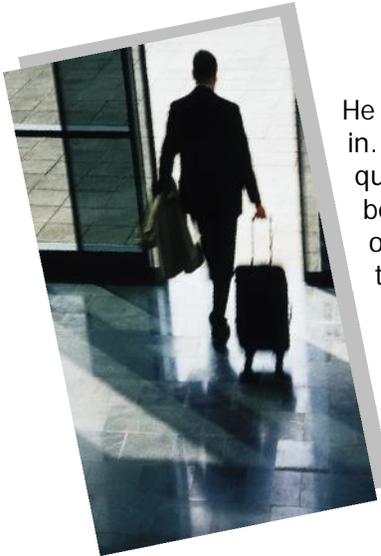


He thought about his wife. How she said she'd email him once she got to her parent's house in Russia, but never did – except for one. It was raining heavily and she couldn't make it to her parent's house and that she had to stay in a hotel for a night. Then nothing again.

He shivered at the thought. Then he stared up at the ceiling and said to himself in a shaky voice. "It's just a rumour." And as he did, he turned to his side and looked at the photo of his wife next to the bed, and wondered.

After flying a long Business Class flight, he took his baggage and a cab to his hotel. He was tired from the stress of working the whole flight. He rested his head against the side of the door and tried to take his mind off work and just relax.

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He had arrived. He walked towards the receptionist and checked in. The receptionist was a woman, and was asking very personal questions which made him feel uncomfortable. The woman behind the desk stopped questioning him and handed the keys over with a smile. The man paused for a moment and went up to his room.

He unpacked his suitcase and started to work again. Hours passed and he was finally done with it. He yawned then ordered room service. Instantly, the same woman from the receptionist came up, only in different uniform and with food in her hands. She handed it to him and left with the same smile.

How strange, the man thought. But it didn't matter – he was hungry. He ate the chicken and drank the soup. After watching a bit of TV, he turned it off and headed for the bathroom.

Then he froze. He couldn't believe his eyes. The rumour; it was true.

There was a woman in the bathtub, dead and motionless, right before his eyes. He was horrified. He opened his mouth to scream but it came out as a weak squeak.

He turned away, and ran out of the room into the lobby. He hurried over to the receptionist, who was talking on the phone. She was a different woman, with dark skin and green eyes.

"Excuse me, there's a dead woman in my bathtub!" he stammered.

At first, the woman looked at him as though he was some unknown species from a distant planet, then she asked him what floor he was staying on. He told her the fourth. She looked at him with shock in her eyes. Then, slowly said, "I'm sorry sir... we don't have a fourth floor."

Cold silence.

"But... but I saw her! She was dead in my bathtub!" he said, panicking.

More silence.

Then she took a deep breath, and called the manager. The manager came out of his office and asked the man about what had happened. He explained the whole story. The manager thought, then gasped.

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He took the man into his office, then sat behind his desk and played with his pen. And explained.

"Five years ago, that woman was murdered in her room in the bathtub. Few people knew about it and so we tried to cover it up. We took down the fourth floor and continued our business with only three floors. If people asked, we'd say four was an unlucky number. No one knows how she was murdered, and the investigators couldn't find any trace of the killer. So they gave up on the case."

"I assume the receptionist that led you to your room and the maid that brought you the food were both the ghosts of the woman. You may ask, why could you see her and others couldn't? Simple: the dead only show themselves to people they know and love, which also means that she was related to you. She was also the only one who knew of the fourth floor.

"I'm sorry to tell you this, but the woman may be your wife."

Dead silence.

A tear trickled down the man's face. Everything seemed to add up now. But there was one thing that bothered him. His throat blocked with pain and anger, he asked, "How do you know all this?"



Without any time to react, the manager drew a knife from his pocket and stabbed the man in the chest. Blood everywhere. He slowly collapsed to the floor, lines of confusion etched on his face. He was in pain. The manager bent down to his knees and whispered quietly into the man's ear.

"I killed her. She was mine, and you took her away from me."

He got back up and stared down at the man.



"For years, I have wanted revenge, today my wish has come true."

Then slowly and painfully, he closed his eyes and thought of his wife one last time, with the mad laughter of the killer ringing in his ears.