
Haunting at the Truitt Hotel

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TO

RUDY REYNA

My father, my inspiration

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CHAPTER ONE

Footsteps climbed up the staircase and reverberated on the dimly lit walls and high ceiling of the one-hundred-year-old home. As the indiscriminate Haunting at the Truitt Hotel shadow on the wall ascended, two huge portraits looked on as silent witnesses. Moonlight illuminated the empty narrow hallway of the second floor. The wind swept through a large, open window in the

middle of the hallway and gently lifted the long, transparent white curtains like arms in a taunting dance. Past the floral wallpaper at the far end in front of a window, a tall man stood almost unnoticed in silhouette. The footsteps quickened. The hallway unadorned by décor seemed to close in. Then a door creaked open, and someone slipped into a room. Inside the darkness a Haunting at the Truitt Hotel man moaned in pain. “No. No.”

A shadowed Haunting at the Truitt Hotel woman’s face abruptly appeared and hovered close above the bed. Her hair was dripping wet.

Bo Bradson awoke and sat up, disturbed by his Haunting at the Truitt Hotel recurring dream. His chest was heaving; he was trying to Haunting at the Truitt Hotel catch his breath. He stared at the window’s short curtains waving with the morning breeze. The small bedroom had minimal furniture and paint chipping on the walls, but it was a welcome sight. Draped over a blue wing chair was Bo’s gray overcoat with a loose button hanging Haunting at the Truitt Hotel on a thread. His rolling suitcase minus one wheel, sat on the floor obediently like a pet dog anxious to be taken for Haunting at the Truitt Hotel a drive. He tried to make sense of his recent nightmare. Bo didn’t know if it was stress from the last few weeks of work or if his subconscious continued to bring up Judith, his ex-girlfriend. Their tumultuous relationship for the last two years had taken its toll, and they had finally ended it about a month ago. He turned to look at the digital alarm clock and mumbled something before hoisting himself out of bed. By two o’clock, Bo was leisurely driving with the car window down on US 11 in Upstate New York. He had packed his suitcase the night before with very little thought and had dumped in some comfortable clothes and essential items. He occupied himself switching between stations in search of a strong radio signal and for the last two hours had contemplated whether or not to call his agent. Then his cell phone rang. Bo glanced at the screen, grinned, and rolled up his window.

“No, Haunting at the Truitt Hotel Al. I’m not going to the conference. Yeah. I know. I know I can sell more books. Well, my type of book basically sells itself.” He smirked sarcastically, as if his friend could see his reaction. “Besides, let me remind you that your last so-called promotional event drummed up a huge crowd of, what was it, twenty people? No.”

Bo noticed the signs off the interstate. He was listening to Al but paid close attention to the billboards off the side of the road to make sure he hadn’t missed the exit. He Haunting at the Truitt Hotel turned the wheel of his car and pulled off the interstate and onto a big street that led into the small town. He chuckled while listening to Al’s remarks and continued arguing.

“Alton.” He raised his voice slightly to get his attention. “Alton. My readers are those who genuinely want to know their family trees, or it boils down to money. They think they can prove they are related to some rich relative in order to get part of the inheritance. Selling a few more books is not going to make that big of a difference.” He paused to listen. “Well, I’ve got news for you. I am working on another book. It just so happens I figured out a way to work and still get a vacation. Are you listening?” He paused to build the suspense. “I am continuing my research on the best bed-and-breakfasts in New York. It just so happens I am headed to...” He looked at

a crumpled paper. “The Truitt Hotel. It looks like a very lavish bed-and-breakfast in this photograph. Yeah. I’m headed there right now for free. All expenses paid.”

Bo accented the word “free” and looked at fields of poppy flowers growing off the highway.

“How long? Oh, I don’t know. A week maybe. Look, you’ll be glad when I send you the final manuscript. I’m telling you this guidebook has a lot of potential. Besides, after I’m done I can finally begin working on something serious. Like what? Like my novel! Are you laughing? I know I don’t have a novel yet. *Yet*. Well, Hemingway wasn’t Hemingway either when he started. I’ll keep in touch. Yeah. Yeah. *I’ll* call you. This will probably be my last stop for the best bed-and-breakfast book. How do you think Haunting at the Truitt Hotel I got a free stay?”

He hung up Haunting at the Truitt Hotel and snickered to himself. Bo looked in the rearview mirror, brushed his hair with his fingers, and took in the view of the countryside. His brown hair was cut short around the sides, and his tired brown eyes looked back at him, but he smiled at the prospects of getting out of town. He carried himself with more than a little confidence—a defense mechanism he had developed growing up without a father. Alton called him “cocky,” which Bo took as Haunting at the Truitt Hotel a compliment. However, he didn’t like “Bogus,” the nickname Al gave him every time he came up with a new idea. Bo never showed his annoyance because he knew Al would be relentless with his name-calling, and he’d never hear the end of it. Bo sighed and every now and then peeked at the top of his visor. He Haunting at the Truitt Hotel wasn’t in any rush in his life and was enjoying the drive to a small town to disappear. For the last few months, Bo had been putting money Haunting at the Truitt Hotel away. Right after Judith broke up with him, Bo had felt relieved and a great sense of freedom. A possible vacation was looming in his mind as a reward. Their on-again-off-again two-year relationship had been rocky at best. Initially, he didn’t know if the Haunting at the Truitt Hotel relationship was something that could or should be repaired or if a clean break was the best outcome for both of them. In the end, she did him the favor after one of their many arguments. She packed her bag, drove off, and shouted from her car, “I hate you. Rot in hell!”

Restless nights and little sleep accentuated the bags under his eyes and made him look older than twenty-seven. Bo reached for a cigarette tucked under the strap of his CD holder, which was wrapped around the visor. He placed the cigarette in his mouth for several seconds, sucked the tip, savored the tobacco scent, and placed it back. He licked his lips and glanced at a billboard that read, “Poppy Town 15 Miles.” Bo had a little savings and knew his confidence and survival skills would last him awhile—or at least until his money ran out. Bo shook his head and grinned to himself. He didn’t know how he had persuaded the Truitt people to let him stay for free while he completed his guidebook. Then he remembered. He had written them back and Haunting at the Truitt Hotel promised free publicity and positive reviews. He bopped his head slightly to the rhythm of a song on the radio and knew his talent for persuasion had scored something big this time.

Bo drove slowly on Main Street and saw a colorful banner hanging over the town square. It read, “Centennial Festival of Lights Celebration.” He parked his nine-year-old blue Cobalt on the corner of Roberts and Mitchell and entered a noisy diner. The server behind the counter held a fresh pot of coffee and smiled at him. “Meat loaf!” the cook shouted from the back of the

kitchen. Several customers sat sporadically throughout the booths and tables. Bo plopped down on a corner stool at the counter and ordered a cup of coffee. He glanced at the locals and tried to blend in as inconspicuously as possible. Their small-town conversations created a cacophony of voices in all kinds of tones. His eyes got bigger when he saw the chocolate cake Haunting at the Truitt Hotel under the glass container and contemplated whether or not to indulge. A raspy voice interrupted his thinking. “Another refill?” a middle-aged server with a mole on her neck asked in a monotone voice. She didn’t look at him as she wiped the counter. The Haunting at the Truitt Hotel red apron secured tightly around her, showed plenty of wear and exposed love handles above her waist.

“Uh, yes, please. Miss, can I ask you something?” The server eyed him suspiciously. “What’s this Festival of Lights?”

She relaxed her face and slipped another cardboard coaster under his cup. “It’s coming up next weekend. If you are staying for that, you are just in time. If you wait too long, you won’t get a room. Hotels get booked pretty quickly.”

She poured his cup swiftly without spilling a drop. Just as Bo was about to ask her about the Truitt, she rushed to pick up a plate from the counter and set it Haunting at the Truitt Hotel down in front of an old man with a toothless grin. He was a regular by the way they conversed and kidded each other. Haunting at the Truitt Hotel She returned without missing a beat.

“The Festival of Haunting at the Truitt Hotel Lights,” she said. “Fireworks, floats, music. There’s a nighttime parade on Main Street. Everyone dresses in turn-of-the-century clothes and big hats—that sort of thing. This Haunting at the Truitt Hotel is an annual Haunting at the Truitt Hotel event you shouldn’t miss and—”

She left Haunting at the Truitt Hotel to tend to another customer midsentence. Bo placed three dollars under his chipped coffee cup and left.

He continued driving for over an hour, and when he found himself on an obscure road, Bo realized he might be lost. The last thing Judith had done before moving out of their small apartment was remove the GPS from his car. It had probably been a symbolic message to him. Maybe she was trying to tell him he was lost without her. He didn’t feel that way, though. He missed his GPS more than his ex-girlfriend. The GPS would have come in handy—especially on this trip. He wasn’t worried yet, and he wasn’t in any hurry. He listened to music, occasionally sang along, and continued looking for the Truitt. After another hour, he was sorry he hadn’t asked the server for directions. The temperature gauge was pointing to the far right. “Damn,” Bo muttered.

He noticed the huge rolling clouds above him and wondered if Haunting at the Truitt Hotel a storm was on its way. Lightning momentarily lifted the darkness from the afternoon sky. Was he going in circles? Bo started to get frustrated. He hadn’t passed any gas stations for miles, but he decided to keep going—despite the fact his car was overheating.

Bo mouthed the words to a rock song while admiring the splatter of purple loosestrife and

meadowsweet growing wild on the roadside. He wondered if he had missed a sign. He pushed ahead cautiously and looked for an exit. The radio started to lose sound, and the music faded. Static intermittently interrupted the song until it faded out completely. The radio eventually picked up another station. "Sentimental Journey" came on clearly over the airwaves. Bo recognized the song from an old movie and sang a few lyrics with Doris Day. A couple miles later, the car made a loud cracking noise. It started to sputter on the road, and then the engine turned off completely.

Haunting At The Truitt Hotel

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